



City of Gahanna

Meeting Minutes

Planning Commission

200 South Hamilton Road
Gahanna, Ohio 43230

Sarah Pollyea, Chair
Michael Suriano, Vice Chair
Michael Greenberg
Elizabeth Laser
James Mako
Thomas Shapaka
Michael Tamarkin

Sophia McGuire, Deputy Clerk of Council

Wednesday, March 11, 2026

6:30 PM

City Hall, Council Chambers

A. CALL MEETING TO ORDER/PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE/ROLL CALL

Gahanna Planning Commission met in regular session on March 11, 2026. The agenda for this meeting was published on March 6, 2026. Chair Sarah Pollyea called the meeting to order at 6:31 p.m. with the Pledge of Allegiance led by Thom Shapaka.

Present 5 - Chair Sarah Pollyea, Vice Chair Michael Suriano, Thomas W. Shapaka, Elizabeth Laser, and Michael Tamarkin

Absent 2 - James Mako, and Michael Greenberg

B. ADDITIONS OR CORRECTIONS TO THE AGENDA - None

C. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

[2026-0055](#)

Planning Commission meeting minutes 2.11.2026

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

Yes: 5 - Chair Pollyea, Vice Chair Suriano, Shapaka, Laser and Tamarkin

Absent: 2 - Mako and Greenberg

D. SWEAR IN APPLICANTS & SPEAKERS

Assistant City Attorney Matt Roth administered an oath to those persons wishing to present testimony this evening.

E. APPLICATIONS - PUBLIC COMMENT

Carpenter Road

[V-0005-2026](#)

To consider a Variance Application to vary Section 1103.07(e) - Large Lot Residential of the Codified Ordinances of the City of Gahanna; for property located at 360 Carpenter Road; Parcel ID 025-002216; Current Zoning R-1 - Large Lot Residential; Mohanad Zamara, applicant.

City Planner Maddie Capka introduced the application. She presented an aerial image of the site and explained that the existing property functioned as a flag lot. Although the parcel exceeded two acres in size, it did not meet the required 100 feet of frontage for the R-1 (Large Lot Residential) zoning district.

Capka stated that the applicant requested a variance to allow creation of a new parcel with no frontage on the public right-of-way. The zoning code required all R-1 properties to have at least 100 feet of frontage. After the proposed lot split, the new parcel would have no frontage and would rely solely on shared access via the existing driveway associated with the flag lot.

Capka explained that the existing parcel had only 27.5 feet of frontage, which fell significantly short of the required 100 feet. Following the proposed split, the resulting parcels would consist of approximately 1.7 acres to the north and 0.5 acres to the south. Both parcels would continue to meet the minimum lot size requirements for the R-1 district.

Capka noted that the proposal required a subdivision without plat application, which had not yet been submitted, but would follow if the variance received approval. The applicant submitted a shared access agreement for use of the existing driveway. Staff confirmed that the existing house on the property would remain compliant with all applicable code requirements, including setbacks, after the lot split.

Capka presented a site plan illustrating the proposed division of the property. The new parcel, outlined in red, would measure approximately 100 feet in width, which would satisfy width requirements if it fronted a public right-of-way. However, it would only have access through the shared driveway, which staff identified in purple on the plan. Staff also noted that the existing house would remain approximately 74.5 feet from the new parcel.

Capka identified the requested variance under Chapter 1103.07(e), which required 100 feet of frontage for R-1 properties. The proposed southern parcel would have zero feet of frontage and therefore required approval of the variance.

Capka reviewed the standard variance criteria and stated that all criteria must be satisfied for approval. They are:

- The variance is not likely to result in substantial damage to the essential character of the neighborhood.
- The variance is not likely to result in damage to adjoining properties.
- The variance is not likely to affect the delivery of government services.
- The variance is not likely to result in environmental impacts greater than what is typical for other lots in the neighborhood.
- The variance is necessary for the economical use of the property, and such economical use of the property cannot be achieved through another method.
- The variance is not likely to undermine the objectives of the Land Use Plan.
- Whether the variance is substantial and is the minimum necessary to make possible the reasonable use of land or structures.
- The practical difficulty could be eliminated by some other method, even if the solution is less convenient or more costly to achieve.

Staff recommended approval of the variance as submitted. Staff explained that the applicant provided the shared access agreement at the request of the Engineering Department, which subsequently expressed no objection to the variance or the proposed subdivision without plat application.

Capka further noted that the Planning Commission recently approved two similar frontage variances associated with lot splits at 4444 Shull Road and 52 Price Road. However, staff clarified that those cases involved parcels that still maintained frontage on a public right-of-way.

Chair Pollyea opened public comment at 6:37 p.m.

Martha Hunley approached the podium and introduced herself to the

Commission. She explained that she represented the applicant, who could not attend because he was overseas. She stated that the applicant requested approval of the variance to allow access to a single-family home on the property. She explained that the configuration of the lot did not provide sufficient space for a second driveway and that a shared driveway offered the only practical access solution while minimizing additional curb cuts along the roadway. She stated that the lot size could accommodate a second home while maintaining required setbacks and the character of the surrounding neighborhood. She added that granting the variance would allow reasonable use of the property while maintaining safe and efficient access. She concluded by offering to answer questions.

Mike Welty, 350 Carpenter Road, explained that he lived adjacent to the subject property. He stated that he and his wife chose the neighborhood because of its privacy and unique character. He explained that approval of the variance could result in a new house being built directly behind his property, which he believed would reduce privacy and negatively affect property values. He stated that the proposed development would alter the character of the neighborhood and require him to install additional screening to restore privacy. He urged the Commission to oppose the variance.

Larry Rumsey, 340 Carpenter Road, introduced himself and explained that he lived immediately west of the subject property. He stated that a new home could be built within close proximity to his house, which would impact his privacy. He explained that he built his home decades earlier because of the rural nature of the area and expressed concern that the proposal would change that character. He also raised concerns about stormwater drainage, noting that the area lacked storm sewers and that additional development could worsen water runoff conditions. He stated that he opposed the variance.

Craig Wales, 332 Carpenter Road, stated that he lived nearby. He explained that he selected the area because of its rural feel, large lot sizes, and privacy. He expressed concern that adding another home would alter the character of the neighborhood and reduce privacy for adjacent property owners. He stated that he opposed the request.

Russ Funk, 352 Carpenter Road, introduced himself to the Commission

and stated that he lived adjacent to the property. He stated that he valued the privacy and natural setting of the area and expressed concern that additional development would significantly change those conditions. He stated that a new home would be visible from his property and diminish the sense of privacy that residents currently enjoyed. He stated that he opposed the variance request.

There being no other members of the public wishing to make comment at that time, Chair Pollyea closed public comment and opened discussion among the Commission at 6:46 p.m.

Mr. Shapaka expressed curiosity about the history of the lot. He inquired with Ms. Hunley about the intent behind the proposed split. Ms. Hunley stated that the applicant purchased the property at auction and later decided to pursue a lot split. She confirmed that the applicant intended to build a home on the new parcel, but was not aware of specific plans for use of the home.

Vice Chair Suriano asked about fire department review and zoning limitations; City Planner Capka confirmed that the fire department had no concerns and that the property would remain zoned R-1.

Ms. Laser asked whether the Commission previously approved a lot with zero frontage; City Planner Capka stated that she was not aware of any such approvals. She noted there were not minimum lot frontage requirements until the 2024 Zoning Code rewrite.

Mr. Tamarkin asked questions regarding the driveway setback, scope of the variance, and administrative review of future development. City Planner Capka explained that the applicant intended to bring the driveway into compliance, that the Commission considered only the frontage variance, and that staff would review future subdivision and construction details administratively, including drainage and engineering concerns. Mr. Tamarkin confirmed that new construction would need to adhere to established setbacks, and that if setbacks were not met, the applicant would need to request approval from the Commission.

Chair Pollyea asked about the applicant's intentions for the property, and Ms. Hunley stated that the applicant planned to sell the homes and had no specific construction timeline.

Mr. Shapaka inquired about current setbacks. Ms. Capka stated the side setbacks are 15 feet, rear setbacks are 25 feet, and front setbacks are 35 feet.

Mr. Suriano expressed concerns about emergency vehicle access and confirmed with staff that if a new home was constructed on the site, it would not need to return to the Planning Commission for review as another application, such as a Final Development Plan.

A motion was made by Suriano, seconded by Shapaka, that the Variance be Approved.. The motion failed by the following vote:

Yes: 2 - Chair Pollyea and Tamarkin

No: 3 - Vice Chair Suriano, Shapaka and Laser

Absent: 2 - Mako and Greenberg

Crescent Woods

[V-0006-2026](#)

To consider a Variance Application to vary Section 1111.03 - Permanent Sign Standards of the Codified Ordinances of the City of Gahanna; for property located at 721 Crescent Woods Drive; Parcel ID 025-014176; Current Zoning R-4 - Multi-Unit Residential; Casto Crescent Woods; Don Haight, applicant.

City Planner Maddie Capka introduced the next application, a variance request for the property located at 721 Crescent Woods Drive. Staff explained that the site was located on the northern side of Tech Center Drive, zoned R-4 for Multi-unit Residential, and consisted of the Crescent Woods apartment complex. Staff noted that the property also had frontage along the I-270 on-ramp to the north.

Capka provided a history of the site, stating that in 2020 the City of Gahanna approved rezoning, conditional use, and variance applications for a multifamily development. In 2021, the city approved a Final Development Plan, design review, and additional variance applications for the same project, including a variance permitting freeway signage up to 17 feet in height and 120 square feet in area, as well as a variance eliminating screening along the freeway. She explained that in 2023 the city approved further applications to modify the project scope and site layout. Staff stated that as of 2026, construction was nearly complete, with only final inspections remaining.

Capka explained that the applicant requested a variance to allow one monument sign to be located 8 feet 1 inch from the edge of the right-of-way along the I-270 on-ramp, where the zoning code required a minimum setback of 15 feet. She stated that the proposed sign measured 80 square feet in area and 10.5 feet in height. She noted that the sign area complied with code requirements and that the height exceeded code by 2.5 feet but was already permitted under a previously approved variance.

Capka explained that the site could accommodate up to three monument signs due to frontage on three rights-of-way. Staff stated that two other monument signs, located along Crescent Place and Tech Center Drive, complied with all code requirements and were not part of the variance request.

Capka described site constraints affecting the placement of the proposed sign, including a water line and a retaining wall along the northern portion of the property. Staff explained that these features prevented placement of the sign farther from the right-of-way and made compliance with the 15-foot setback requirement impractical. Staff stated that the Engineering Department prohibited installation of the sign over the water line, which required shifting the sign closer to the freeway.

Capka presented an aerial image and site plan showing the location of the proposed sign, as well as the locations of the retaining wall and water line. She also presented a rendering of the sign, noting that the setback measurement extended to the edge of the masonry planter base.

Capka identified the requested variance under Chapter 1111.03, which required monument signs to be located at least 15 feet from the edge of the right-of-way. She explained that the proposed sign would be located closer than permitted.

Capka stated that the application must meet the standard variance criteria for approval. They are:

- The variance is not likely to result in substantial damage to the essential character of the neighborhood.
- The variance is not likely to result in damage to adjoining

properties.

- The variance is not likely to affect the delivery of government services.
- The variance is not likely to result in environmental impacts greater than what is typical for other lots in the neighborhood.
- The variance is necessary for the economical use of the property, and such economical use of the property cannot be achieved through another method.
- The variance is not likely to undermine the objectives of the Land Use Plan.
- Whether the variance is substantial and is the minimum necessary to make possible the reasonable use of land or structures.
- The practical difficulty could be eliminated by some other method, even if the solution is less convenient or more costly to achieve.

Staff reported that the Engineering Department did not object to the request and noted that the applicant originally proposed a location only 2 feet from the right-of-way but revised the plan to 8 feet 1 inch at staff's recommendation.

Capka concluded by stating that although a freeway-oriented sign was not necessary for the site, similar variances were approved for nearby properties along I-270 and that the applicant cited increased visibility as the reason for the request. Staff reported no objection to the variance as submitted.

Chair Pollyea opened public comment at 7:07 p.m. and invited the applicant to speak.

Don Haight, representing Morrison Sign Company, introduced himself and indicated that he was available to answer questions.

With no members of the public wishing to speak at that time, Chair Pollyea closed public comment at 7:07 p.m. and opened the floor for Commission questions.

Mr. Shapaka asked whether similar signage variances along I-270 encroached into setback requirements. City Planner Capka responded that she did not recall, though there was possibly one on Buckles Court

along I-270. Mr. Shapaka asked whether rotating the sign could allow compliance with the setback. Mr. Haight explained that the proposed orientation maximized visibility from both directions of traffic. Mr. Shapaka also inquired about placing signage on the building; Mr. Haight stated that residential use and building design made that option impractical.

Vice Chair Suriano asked whether a smaller planter could meet the setback requirement. Mr. Haight responded that site constraints and structural concerns prevented further adjustment. Vice Chair Suriano asked about potential sightline issues, and City Planner Capka stated that the Engineering Department had not identified any concerns.

Ms. Laser asked about visibility impacts for drivers, and Mr. Haight confirmed that the sign would not obstruct sightlines.

Mr. Tamarkin asked about the retaining wall and its relation to the sign placement. Mr. Haight explained that the retaining wall sat behind the proposed sign and that the sign placement avoided structural issues. Mr. Tamarkin also asked whether total signage square footage remained within code limits, and City Planner Capka confirmed that it did.

Chair Pollyea asked about the necessity of the freeway-facing sign. Mr. Haight stated that the sign would improve visibility for the development, which sat far from primary roads and remained difficult to see from the freeway. Chair Pollyea also asked about future maintenance in the area, and Mr. Haight stated that the applicant would accommodate any necessary work, including relocating the sign if required.

A motion was made by Laser, seconded by Tamarkin, that the Variance be Approved.

Mr. Shapaka stated that he could not support the application due to concerns about access and lot configuration.

Vice Chair Suriano expressed concerns about access, driveway conditions, and the lack of future Commission review.

Ms. Laser opposed the request due to the lack of frontage and potential impact on neighborhood character.

Mr. Tamarkin supported the variance, stating that the property owner had the right to use the land and that the variance addressed an existing limitation.

Chair Pollyea acknowledged concerns about frontage and neighborhood opposition but agreed that the applicant had the right to develop the property and expressed support for the request.

The motion carried by the following vote:

Yes: 5 - Chair Pollyea, Vice Chair Suriano, Shapaka, Laser and Tamarkin

Absent: 2 - Mako and Greenberg

Academy Park

[V-0007-2026](#)

To consider a Variance Application to vary Sections 1107.01(g)(1) - City-Wide Design Standards; 1109.01(e)(2) - Parking, Access, and Circulation; and 1109.02(e) - Setbacks and Structure Placement of the Codified Ordinances of the City of Gahanna; for property located at 1201 Cherry Bottom Road; Parcel ID 025-004304; Current Zoning CON - Conservation; Academy Park; John Witkowski, applicant.

City Planner Maddie Capka introduced the applications. Staff explained that the request included a variance application and a major development plan for redevelopment of Academy Park. The property was zoned Conservation, a district reserved for park uses.

Capka described the proposed redevelopment, which included repaving the existing parking lot and adding 47 new parking spaces, including four electric vehicle charging spaces and five bicycle parking spaces. She noted that the existing park did not currently provide EV charging. The project also included installation of new playground equipment and construction of a restroom and storage building of approximately 1,500 square feet and 21.25 feet in height.

Capka explained that the building utilized permitted materials, with the exception of a green-colored fiber cement board. While fiber cement board was permitted, the specific green color was not included on the list of approved colors in the zoning code. She stated that approval of the color fell under the discretion of the Planning Commission as part of the development plan.

Capka then presented a site plan and explained that most of the existing parking lot would remain in its current configuration, with repaving and updated landscaping. She noted that zoning code landscaping requirements applied only to the new portion of the parking lot. Capka identified the location of the new building, playground area, and dumpster

area, noting that the dumpster location required a variance.

Capka reviewed the landscape plan and stated that the applicant exceeded all landscaping requirements. The applicant provided approximately 4,000 square feet of landscaping where 1,100 square feet were required and proposed 27 parking lot trees where 12 were required. Capka also confirmed that the project met additional tree caliper requirements. Capka explained that the code required a continuous three-foot-high screening between the parking lot and the right-of-way. However, staff noted that existing mature vegetation along Cherry Bottom Road already screened the site and that the applicant requested a variance from this requirement.

Capka presented street view images showing that existing foliage largely obscured the site from view. She then reviewed building renderings and noted that the structure did not include windows, resulting in zero percent transparency, whereas the code required 25 percent. She explained that windows were not typical for restroom and storage buildings. Capka also reiterated that the green color of the building required the Commission's approval.

Capka outlined three variance requests: one for the lack of required window transparency, one for the absence of a continuous screening barrier along the right-of-way, and one for locating dumpsters in front of the principal structure rather than to the rear. She explained that the dumpster location aligned closely with the existing configuration and that site constraints prevented relocation behind the building.

Capka shared the standard variance criteria that must be met. They are:

- The variance is not likely to result in substantial damage to the essential character of the neighborhood.
- The variance is not likely to result in damage to adjoining properties.
- The variance is not likely to affect the delivery of government services.
- The variance is not likely to result in environmental impacts greater than what is typical for other lots in the neighborhood.
- The variance is necessary for the economical use of the property, and such economical use of the property cannot be achieved

through another method.

- The variance is not likely to undermine the objectives of the Land Use Plan.
- Whether the variance is substantial and is the minimum necessary to make possible the reasonable use of land or structures.
- The practical difficulty could be eliminated by some other method, even if the solution is less convenient or more costly to achieve.

Staff recommended approval of the variances, noting that they were minor and necessary for the project. Capka explained that the building's function justified the lack of windows, that existing vegetation provided effective screening, and that site layout limited alternative dumpster placement.

Capka also reviewed the Major Development Plan criteria and recommended approval. Staff stated that the site required redevelopment and additional parking. Staff noted that building materials complied with code, except for the green color, which covered approximately 30 percent of the building. Staff explained that the zoning code allowed up to 25 percent of a non-approved color without Commission approval and that the proposed color slightly exceeded that threshold. Staff stated that the color was appropriate for a park setting and complemented the building design.

Chair Pollyea opened public comment and invited the applicant to speak at 7:23 p.m.

Ms. Catherine Eichel, Capital Projects Manager of the Parks Department for the City of Gahanna, introduced herself and offered to answer questions.

There being no other members of the public wishing to make comment at that time, Chair Pollyea closed public comment at 7:24 p.m. and opened the floor for Commission questions.

Mr. Shapaka asked whether the proposed green color aligned with city branding. Ms. Eichel confirmed that the color matched the city's branding palette. Mr. Shapaka also asked about the number of dumpsters, and Ms. Eichel explained that the site served as a public recycling location, with multiple dumpsters designated for recycling use.

Chair Pollyea asked whether the green color would be used in other parks. Ms. Eichel explained that the design reflected the character of Academy Park and aligned with broader branding elements, including nearby signage and trail features.

A motion was made by Tamarkin, seconded by Suriano, that the Variance be Approved.

Discussion:

Mr. Shapaka supported the variance, stating that the design elements were appropriate and that the variances were reasonable given the building’s function.

Vice Chair Suriano supported the request, noting that window requirements did not suit the building’s use and that existing screening conditions were sufficient.

Ms. Laser also expressed support.

The motion carried by the following vote:

Yes: 5 - Chair Pollyea, Vice Chair Suriano, Shapaka, Laser and Tamarkin

Absent: 2 - Mako and Greenberg

[DP-0001-2026](#)

To consider a Development Plan for property located at 1201 Cherry Bottom Road; Parcel ID 025-004304; Current Zoning CON - Conservation; Academy Park; John Witkowski, applicant.

A motion was made by Tamarkin, seconded by Suriano, that the Development Plan be Approved.

Discussion:

Vice Chair Suriano expressed support and stated that he looked forward to improvements at the park.

Mr. Tamarkin stated that the park improvements were long overdue and would benefit the community.

Chair Pollyea also supported the project and noted her personal connection to the park and enthusiasm for the improvements.

The motion carried by the following vote:

Yes: 5 - Chair Pollyea, Vice Chair Suriano, Shapaka, Laser and Tamarkin

Absent: 2 - Mako and Greenberg

Code Changes

[CC-0001-2026](#)

To recommend approval to City Council, changes to Part Eleven - Zoning Code, Chapters 1103, 1105, 1107, 1109, 1111, 1113, 1117, and 1123 of the Codified Ordinances of the City of Gahanna.

Director of Planning Michael Blackford provided a presentation on Zoning Code changes. He explained that the Commission considered the second installment of zoning code changes to the new zoning code approved in spring 2024. He noted that the first set of changes occurred later that year during the fall and winter. He described how staff developed recommended changes through discussions with the Commission, frequently requested variances, issues identified with the code, project reviews, and unusual requests that did not always advance to the Planning Commission. He stated that the recommendations generally fell into three categories: reinstating provisions from the previous zoning code, revising existing code, and introducing new code language.

Director Blackford explained that the previous zoning code contained approximately 400 pages, while the current code contained fewer than 200 pages. He stated that although staff removed unnecessary content, some omitted provisions still held value and warranted reintroduction. He reviewed several provisions proposed for reinstatement. He described buffering and screening standards, noting that the prior code required a continuous six- to eight-foot screen for both A and B screening standards. He explained that the current code omitted this requirement for the B standard and that staff recommended reinstating it, particularly for industrial uses adjacent to residential areas.

He discussed outdoor lighting standards and recalled that previous code requirements proved excessively restrictive compared to industry recommendations. He stated that the City revised those standards several years earlier to allow one foot-candle at the property line for non-residential uses and 0.5 foot-candles adjacent to residential properties. He noted that the 0.5 foot-candle standard did not carry forward into the new code and recommended restoring it.

Director Blackford addressed general sign standards and explained that staff proposed adding a few omitted words to clarify prohibited signs. He

stated that the omission currently allowed attention-getting devices, such as inflatable figures, which the prior code prohibited. He recommended restoring that language to prevent such devices.

He also discussed zoning map and text amendment notification requirements. He explained that staff previously revised those requirements to address issues with rezoning signage but did not include the updated language in the new zoning code. He stated that staff recommended reinstating that language as originally adopted.

Director Blackford then reviewed revisions to the current code. He noted that staff proposed reducing the setback requirement for accessory structures in the R-1 zoning district from 10 feet to 5 feet. He explained that applicants frequently requested variances for this requirement and that a 5-foot setback aligned with other residential districts. He stated that routinely granting variances indicated that the standard should change.

He also discussed updates to the use table. He explained that staff proposed adding electric vehicle charging stations as a permitted accessory use for clarity, noting that the code already allowed them elsewhere. He further stated that staff proposed adding funeral home and funeral services as permitted uses, explaining that the prior zoning code included them and that staff had recently received multiple inquiries regarding such uses.

Director Blackford explained that the proposed addition of funeral homes and funeral services would apply to four zoning classifications: office, neighborhood commercial, general commercial, and restricted institutional. He stated that these classifications aligned with those in the previous zoning code and that the proposal remained consistent with prior allowances.

He then discussed the Creekside Mixed Use standards and identified conflicting language within the existing code. He noted that one section permitted vinyl and metal materials up to 20 percent of a façade, while a subsequent section prohibited those same materials. He stated that staff recommended removing the prohibition to align with the original intent to allow those materials within the Creekside Mixed Use district.

Director Blackford reviewed parking access and circulation standards, specifically for funeral homes. He explained that the proposed requirement of one parking space per 150 square feet matched the standard from the pre-2024 zoning code and that staff intended to carry that provision forward.

He then outlined proposed revisions to electric vehicle charging requirements, describing them as one of the more substantial changes. He explained that the City originally incorporated sustainability initiatives into the zoning code, including Electric Vehicle (EV) charging requirements, but that nearly all new developments requested variances from those requirements. He stated that staff proposed introducing two types of EV charging options: EV-ready infrastructure, which included wiring and conduit, and Electric Vehicle Supply Equipment (EVSE), which included fully installed charging equipment. He explained that the revised approach allowed flexibility by requiring either option and reducing the number of required spaces if developers installed fully functional charging stations. He added that, for example, a project requiring six EV spaces could provide six EV-ready spaces or three fully equipped EVSE spaces, with each EVSE space counting as two.

Director Blackford addressed erosion and sediment control provisions and explained that the proposed revisions removed specific standards previously tied to Ohio EPA regulations. He stated that the updated language would instead direct applicants to follow current Ohio EPA standards, eliminating the need for frequent code updates when those standards changed.

He then discussed variance provisions and explained that the 2024 zoning code revisions consolidated dimensional and non-dimensional variances under the same approval criteria. He stated that the proposed changes removed outdated references to separate variance types and clarified that the code treated them as a single category.

Director Blackford reviewed updates to the glossary, noting that staff added several definitions related to EV charging. He also explained that staff proposed relocating the definition of portable structures to the appropriate section. Additionally, he discussed a clarification regarding North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) classifications, stating that the revised language would allow trade contractors to operate

as office uses when they conducted only administrative activities without outdoor storage. He explained that staff supported this change based on recent inquiries and existing examples of such operations.

Director Blackford then introduced new code provisions related to the Creekside Mixed Use district. He provided historical context, explaining that when he began working for the City approximately 12 years earlier, Gahanna maintained multiple area plans, several of which focused on Creekside. He stated that the City consistently identified Creekside as a priority area for development. He noted that the zoning code for Creekside had already emphasized development-friendly standards and that subsequent planning efforts, including the 2019 land use plan and the 2024 zoning code rewrite, reinforced the importance of the district. He also referenced the recent strategic and economic development plan, which included significant community engagement and highlighted Creekside as a central focus.

Director Blackford continued by explaining that the strategic planning process provided extensive community engagement regarding the vision for Creekside. He stated that community feedback consistently emphasized the importance of Creekside as the City's most valued area and the desire for high-quality development.

He explained that both the land use plan and the strategic plan encouraged stronger integration between planning documents and development review processes. He stated that staff responded by proposing code language that incorporated goals and recommendations from those plans into the zoning review process. He noted that staff revised the purpose and intent section of the code to reflect those planning documents, which shared consistent themes and objectives.

Director Blackford clarified the distinction between zoning code and land use plans, explaining that zoning code carried the force of law, while land use plans provided recommendations. He noted that Ohio law did not require a comprehensive plan, unlike some other states, and that land use plans typically influenced rezoning decisions rather than standard development reviews. He stated that the proposed changes would expand the relevance of planning documents beyond rezoning cases.

He explained that the proposal introduced new evaluation criteria

specifically for projects within the Creekside Mixed Use (CMU) district. He stated that these criteria would apply when applicants requested deviations, which functioned similarly to variances but allowed greater flexibility in evaluation. He explained that traditional variance criteria focused on physical constraints such as irregular lot shape or topography, which did not align with many modern development requests.

Director Blackford stated that the proposed deviation framework allowed the Planning Commission to evaluate requests based on how well a project advanced the goals and recommendations of the land use plan and strategic plan. He noted that the code identified approximately ten illustrative criteria, including concepts such as vertical mixed-use development, but did not limit evaluation solely to those items.

He provided an example using a recent Creekside project, explaining that under previous code requirements, applicants would have needed to submit multiple applications, including a development plan, design review, and variance. He stated that recent code changes consolidated development plan and design review into a single application, and the proposed changes would further streamline the process by incorporating deviations into the same application rather than requiring a separate variance request.

Director Blackford explained that this approach aligned with broader goals of permit consolidation identified in the land use and strategic plans. He stated that the revised process would allow the Planning Commission to consider whether a project provided community benefits, such as mixed-use development, diverse housing, or structured parking, when evaluating requests for flexibility from strict code standards.

He concluded that the proposed changes would allow the Commission to prioritize project quality over strict adherence to code requirements, particularly within the CMU district. He stated that the framework would support innovative and high-quality development while still maintaining a structured review process.

Director Blackford stated that the proposed approach would work effectively within the CMU district because most development requests in that area required a major development plan and typically included

requests for variances. He explained that the revised process would streamline decision-making by allowing the Planning Commission to make a single motion rather than multiple votes, while still preserving the Commission's ability to approve, approve with conditions, or deny applications.

Chair Pollyea thanked Director Blackford and opened public comment at 8:02 p.m. With no comments from the public, she closed public comment at 8:02 p.m. She then opened the floor for questions from the Commission.

Mr. Shapaka contemplated that reducing the accessory structure setback requirement from 10 feet to 5 feet could create a precedent that might lead applicants to request even smaller setbacks. He also confirmed that the 0.5 foot-candle lighting standard applied only when a property was adjacent to residential uses. Director Blackford confirmed that interpretation.

Mr. Shapaka asked whether attention-getting devices required permits or had time limits. Director Blackford explained that the code previously prohibited such devices and did not classify them as temporary signs. He stated that without the proposed language, those devices fell into a loophole and did not require permits. He confirmed that the proposed change would prohibit them entirely.

Mr. Shapaka requested clarification on the EV charging requirements, specifically how fewer fully equipped charging stations could satisfy the requirement compared to a greater number of EV-ready spaces. Director Blackford explained that developments would still need to provide the full number of required spaces if they installed only EV-ready infrastructure. However, if they installed fully operational EVSE charging stations, those spaces would count as two each because they provided immediate functionality and required greater investment. Mr. Shapaka acknowledged that this approach encouraged installation of usable charging stations rather than delaying implementation.

Mr. Shapaka then asked about the extent of the Creekside Mixed Use district and its relationship to Olde Gahanna. He suggested that future development might expand into adjacent areas and questioned whether the City should proactively expand the district boundaries. Director

Blackford responded that expansion could occur in the future but noted that City Council had expressed concerns about expanding the district at that time. He acknowledged that development could eventually extend along Mill Street and Granville Street and that the City might revisit boundaries as development progressed.

Mr. Shapaka expressed support for planning ahead for future growth while recognizing the need to balance development with existing community character. He stated that he supported the proposed direction and concluded his questions.

Vice Chair Suriano thanked Director Blackford for the presentation and focused his questions on Creekside material standards. He stated that he prioritized material quality over specific material types and noted that modern materials continued to evolve. He asked whether the proposed changes allowed flexibility for materials such as Exterior Insulation and Finishing Systems (EIFS), vinyl, or composite panels and whether differences existed between front and rear elevations.

Director Blackford responded that the code required front, side, and rear elevations to use similar materials and levels of detail. He acknowledged that staff could allow some flexibility but would not support significant disparities between elevations. He explained that public feedback influenced material standards, noting that vinyl ranked lowest in community surveys. He also acknowledged that material quality continued to improve and that the City could revisit standards as needed.

Director Blackford added that the proposed deviation framework would allow the Planning Commission to evaluate material choices more flexibly, particularly for side and rear elevations. He stated that this approach would allow applicants to propose higher-quality materials on primary façades while using more cost-effective materials elsewhere, subject to Commission review and consistency with planning goals.

Vice Chair Suriano emphasized the importance of maintaining flexibility while preserving the intent of high-quality development within the Creekside Mixed Use district. He stated that the Commission should allow innovative and durable materials while avoiding excessive relaxation of standards that could lead to diminished quality. He expressed concern that certain materials, such as vinyl, could present

long-term performance issues and stressed the need to balance flexibility with accountability.

Director Blackford agreed and stated that the proposed changes to the CMU district, including clarification of prohibited materials, would be less restrictive than the current code while still maintaining standards. He noted that overly rigid code requirements could discourage quality development, particularly when applied to areas not visible to the public. He added that the shift from variances to deviations would help avoid concerns about precedent, as the Commission would evaluate each project on its own merits rather than relying on prior approvals.

Vice Chair Suriano agreed that this approach would prevent incremental erosion of standards through precedent and concluded his comments.

Mr. Tamarkin asked about the prohibition of attention-getting devices and how it would affect promotional activities such as grand openings. He described past practices that included flags, balloons, and other visual displays and asked whether temporary use of such items would be permitted.

Director Blackford responded that many of those promotional items qualified as temporary signs if they contained messaging and could be permitted under the City's temporary sign regulations, which allowed a range of signage without cost. He explained that the proposed language restored a long-standing prohibition on attention-getting devices that did not qualify as signs. He acknowledged that some businesses installed such items without permits and that enforcement typically occurred after the fact, often after the promotional period had ended.

Mr. Tamarkin noted his experience with code enforcement related to temporary signage and acknowledged the practical realities of enforcement.

Mr. Tamarkin then asked about EV charging requirements, specifically the requirement of one charging space per 25 parking spaces and whether it applied only to new construction. Director Blackford explained that the requirement primarily applied to new development or substantial parking lot modifications and noted that applicants could request variances when the requirement did not align with the nature of the use.

Mr. Tamarkin discussed differences among parking types, including residential, office, and short-term retail parking, and questioned whether a uniform EV requirement appropriately addressed those differences. Director Blackford agreed that the needs varied by use and explained that the variance process allowed the Commission to address those differences on a case-by-case basis. He added that use-based distinctions in the code could become difficult to administer as tenants and uses changed over time.

Mr. Tamarkin expressed agreement with addressing such situations through variances rather than additional code complexity.

Vice Chair Suriano then asked about the evaluation criteria for deviations within the Creekside Mixed Use district. Director Blackford explained that staff identified common goals from the land use plan and strategic plan and incorporated approximately ten criteria into the proposed code. He stated that these criteria included elements such as vertical mixed-use development, housing diversity, public gathering spaces, and outdoor amenities.

Director Blackford explained that the Commission would evaluate whether a proposed deviation advanced those goals. He noted that larger or aggregated sites would be more capable of achieving multiple objectives, while smaller parcels might not accommodate all desired features. He stated that the proposed framework allowed the Commission to grant flexibility when projects meaningfully contributed to the broader vision for the Creekside district, particularly in areas such as building design, setbacks, height, parking, and materials.

Vice Chair Suriano stated that the explanation regarding evaluation criteria made sense and asked whether any other members had additional questions.

Chair Pollyea confirmed that no further questions were raised and requested a motion.

A motion was made by Pollyea, seconded by Tamarkin, that the Code Changes be Recommended to Council for Approval. The motion carried by the following vote:

Yes: 5 - Chair Pollyea, Vice Chair Suriano, Shapaka, Laser and Tamarkin

Absent: 2 - Mako and Greenberg

F. UNFINISHED BUSINESS - None

G. NEW BUSINESS - None

H. OFFICIAL REPORTS

Director of Planning

Director Blackford announced that he would participate in a panel at the upcoming National Planning Conference in April. He explained that he and colleagues from other communities would present on incremental zoning reform and share Gahanna's experience.

Council Liaison

Ms. Laser summarized recent City Council activity, including the final meeting in the current building scheduled for April 6, cancellation of April 13 and 20 meetings, and relocation to the new facility on Tech Center Drive beginning April 27. She also reported that Council swore in two new police sergeants, postponed an annexation ordinance involving approximately seven acres from Jefferson Township, and approved a resolution to improve stormwater performance at Academy Park.

Mayor

Mayor Jadwin provided an update on the City's community grant program. She explained that the program originated from CARES and ARPA funding and now operated as an annual program. She stated that the City allocated \$100,000 for the upcoming year and that the application portal would open March 16. She noted that funding priorities included food insecurity, housing assistance, and related programs, and encouraged the Commission to share the information with local nonprofit organizations.

Chair

Chair Pollyea provided a report regarding the ongoing charter review process. She explained that a charter review commission had been meeting regularly and invited members of boards and commissions to submit proposals for consideration. She encouraged Commission members to review the code and participate if interested. Director Blackford and Mayor Jadwin provided additional clarification regarding the charter review process, including meeting schedules, availability of proposal materials online, and the anticipated timeline for recommendations to City Council and potential placement on the November ballot.

I. CORRESPONDENCE AND ACTIONS

Deputy Clerk McGuire reminded members of an upcoming workshop scheduled prior to the April 8 meeting and requested notification of any absences to ensure a quorum.

J. POLL MEMBERS FOR COMMENT

Ms. Laser stated that the meeting provided a valuable learning experience. Chair Pollyea expressed appreciation for the thorough explanations provided during the meeting.

K. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further discussion before the Commission, the meeting was adjourned at 8:37 p.m.