



City of Gahanna

Meeting Minutes

Finance Committee

200 South Hamilton Road
Gahanna, Ohio 43230

Stephen A. Renner, Chair
Merisa K. Bowers
Jamille Jones
Nancy R. McGregor
Kaylee Padova
Michael Schnetzer
Trenton I. Weaver

Jeremy A. VanMeter, Clerk of Council

Monday, November 17, 2025

City Hall, Council Chambers

Immediately following the Regular Council meeting at 7:00 PM on November 17, 2025

A. CALL TO ORDER:

Councilmember Stephen A. Renner, Chair, called the meeting to order at 8:41 p.m. The agenda was published on November 14, 2025. All members were present for the meeting. There were no additions or corrections to the agenda.

B. DISCUSSIONS:

Questions on Department of Parks & Recreation and Department of Planning

[ORD-0049-2025](#) AN ORDINANCE ADOPTING APPROPRIATIONS FOR CURRENT EXPENSES AND OTHER EXPENDITURES OF THE CITY OF GAHANNA DURING THE FISCAL YEAR 2026

Miranda Vollmer, Senior Director of Administrative Services, stated that the Department of Planning would have some items to discuss, and then Parks and Recreation would discuss their 2026 priorities, and finally, the Department of Finance would discuss outstanding questions.

Planning

Director of Planning Michael Blackford introduced the 2026 priorities for the Planning Department. The first priority is to audit and update the Zoning Code to be in line with recommendations of the Land Use Plan and Strategic Plan. Director Blackford noted the latter two documents are not legal documents and the goal is not necessarily for them to match specifications of the Zoning Code. However, he pointed out that the documents represent an aspirational vision for the area. If the Land Use Plan or Strategic Plan highlights mixed-use, high-intensity,

pedestrian-friendly areas, then a zoning code that focuses on agrarian uses and large-lot residential will be in conflict with the city's vision.

A second department priority is to create online mapping tools. He said this goal is about creating awareness within the community about future public hearing applications. The department receives many inquiries about projects they see occurring in their neighborhood, or they see information online. The goal is to create a public tool for residents to be able to learn about what projects are happening where, so there is not misinformation spread that needs to be corrected.

A final priority for the Planning Department is to investigate, analyze, and modify land development processes, permits, and applications. He said that process is one of the lesser-discussed topics of development. Process moves a vision into reality. Director Blackford described the goal as wanting to review processes, examine what is and is not working well, and determine what can be made more efficient. He said it was anticipated to be heavily staff-intensive and would cross multiple departments. There would be no 2026 budget requested for this item because it will be spread through many departments, and the Planning Department's portion was already available in the 2025 budget. He anticipated the overall cost to be in the \$60,000-75,000 range, based on conversations with vendors. He reiterated that improving efficiency for both internal and external customers and reducing permitting time were primary goals of accomplishing this priority.

Parks & Recreation

Parks & Recreation Director Stephania Ferrell noted that the department is in its third year of the implementation of the Parks Master Plan. The priorities outlined are directly in line with the plan, along with outcomes that are defined within the Our Gahanna Strategic Plan. An initial plan is to continue to enhance the elevated standards of care throughout the park system, including investing in updating existing parks, trails and amenities. Director Ferrell explained that this could include elevating the aesthetics of mulchings around trees to updating restroom facilities. It would also include customer service training for seasonal staff. Director Ferrell highlighted staff members who are a representation of what expectations are in the way they interact with one another and with the public.

The second item Director Ferrell highlighted as a 2026 department priority is the transition of the Senior Center to 825 Tech Center Drive. She expressed excitement at the Senior Center entering a new era in the new Civic Center, adding that the department anticipated membership

growth in the new facility.

The third priority for Parks & Recreation is maximizing program options to activate parks, increase use of existing facilities, and supporting the launch of new facilities. Director Ferrell explained that there would be an opportunity to increase and expand indoor spaces through the Exploration Center and the Civic Center.

A fourth priority is improved wayfinding and signage along Big Walnut Trail. Increased functionality and expanded trails are goals, and an ODOT Transportation grant was secured by Project Manager Katherine Eichel, which will specifically improve wayfinding of the Big Walnut Trail system. She elaborated that maintenance of the existing trail system was also a priority.

An additional priority for 2026 is to improve user function of the recreation software and special event applications. There is an existing software, which Ferrell described as a complex system, that handles program registrations, facility reservations, and booking team times. However, the software's user experience is not to the standards the department strives for. Included in the 2026 budget would be a new module for mobile improvements and an expanded training course for staff to develop and simplify processes, overall improving user experience and guiding the confidence of staff.

A final 2026 priority is continued improvement of the existing tree canopy and to plant more trees than are removed. Director Ferrell explained that the Street Tree Program is a vital way to improve the city's tree canopy. The program was first funded in 2024 and has progressed faster than anticipated. The replacement strategy is based in part on removals, and 2026 plans include expansion beyond removals. She said that communication and education are also priorities, and the department has begun highlighting the forestry division with "Forestry Fridays" on social media.

Director Ferrell shifted to answering questions submitted by Council. She shared that in 2025, there were 169 tree removals that were based off either prohibited trees, invasive species, or hazard removals. She happily shared that 340 trees will be planted by the end of 2025. She reiterated that a goal of the department is to plant more trees than are removed. Director Ferrell then responded to a question regarding pickle ball facilities. There were none outlined in the Capital Improvement Plan, but the Parks Master Plan is utilized to prioritize such improvements. She noted many considerations must be made when planning pickleball facilities. Acoustic impact is a major consideration, for example. Ferrell

then explained the department's cost recovery strategy. Outlined in the department's pricing policy, the cost recovery strategy is reviewed annually by the Parks & Recreation Board. Changes are then brought to Council for recommendation and adoption, and tiers are based on community impact. She explained that for every service, revenue is within line of cost recovery targets.

Director Ferrell then shifted to a question regarding indoor program spaces. In addition to 825 Tech Center becoming available in 2026, the Exploration Center is expected to open in fall of 2026. Additionally, the staff creates partnership opportunities with schools and special interest groups. Regarding expanded programming, she described the department as a feeder program to try new experiences at a reasonable price, citing recreational soccer as an example. They hope to provide expanded programming for multiple generations in line with the Parks Master Plan. Regarding departmental expense increases, Director Ferrell noted that Issue 12 identified a need for expanded services throughout the department. An appropriate staffing model was necessary to produce the expected outcomes of the services. Additionally, part-time maintenance workers were transitioned to full-time and the Recreation team became fully staffed. Prior to Issue 12, maintenance decisions were prioritized based on safety, and improvements were halted due to their financial impact. Now, there is an ability to do what is necessary from a maintenance standpoint and also to increase the standard based off of residents' needs.

Councilmember Jones inquired about the acoustic difference between tennis and pickleball. Director Ferrell explained that due to the type of ball and paddle used, it creates a high decibel, an issue that has garnered national attention.

Vice President Weaver inquired about the cost recovery model on page 88 of the budget book. He asked Director Ferrell to elaborate on the chart shown. Director Ferrell explained that the chart breaks down full department expenditures to revenue. The revenue is specifically charges for services and not income revenue. She further explained this using the golf course as a specific example. Golf maximizes the recovery at 105%, and within the model the range should be 90-125%. But, when all expenditures are collapsed, a different percentage is realized based on the amount of expenditures to charges for services. The number represented on page 88 of the budget book is tracking in line with expectations. Director Ferrell noted that seasonal salaries needed to be maximized to maintain competitiveness and anticipated the percent remaining at its current level for an extended period.

Councilmember Padova asked for clarification on the staffing request transition from part-time Recreation Coordinator to a full-time Recreation Coordinator. Director Ferrell explained that there is an age range not being served well. The Coordinator transition will help prioritize the community that could be better served.

President Bowers complimented the department on the Street Tree Program and the tree canopy as a whole. She expressed the importance of these efforts. She shared that in her own neighborhood, there was a grossly buckled sidewalk on a street lined with trees. She explained that the program helped to address the structural issue while preserving the trees that could be maintained. Director Ferrell highlighted the experienced staff who are able to make determinations on tree care without outsourcing it. President Bowers acknowledged how this reflects back on residents' quality of life. She transitioned to a question on camps, such as summer and winter break camps that are offered by the department. She noted the challenges of child care costs and the importance of the camps in offering affordable childcare while layering in other benefits of summer camp. She encouraged Director Ferrell to continue to recognize the importance of the program and value that it brings to the economic ecosystem of the region. Director Ferrell highlighted the efforts of Brian Gill, Recreation Superintendent. She remarked on the efforts to evaluate what the department can do, adding that prior to 2023, staffing models created limitations. But, the camps are accredited by the American Camp Association (ACA), which require a certain ratio of caretakers to children. She explained there is an expectation and responsibility to provide the best level of care possible. She pointed out that staff and campers are returning year after year, and demand is high. They continue to consider options to expand their offerings, and the opening of the indoor space will present an alternative option for the department. Director Ferrell noted that after-school care is currently not a service they provide, and there is an opportunity to create partnerships that will present opportunities for after-school care.

Additional Outstanding Questions

Director of Finance Joann Bury addressed other outstanding questions. First, regarding the question of whether Issue 12 dollars enter the General Fund, she said they do not, as that would not be in compliance with the income tax code. Director Bury then addressed a question regarding the Enterprise Capital Improvement Plan referenced on page 125. She explained that when the official Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) was created, it included proprietary funds. The budget book directs readers back to the official CIP, which lists projects that will be funded. Director Bury addressed a question regarding Special Revenue Funds

on page 129 of the budget book. She described the special revenue funds as mostly stagnant, having an unreserved fund balance left and not generating new revenue. Therefore, they cannot be used for programming. She noted these are reviewed annually. She used the Street Tree Fund as a specific example. The street tree program is coming out of the General Fund. The Street Tree Fund itself is based on some permitting codes and has not generated any revenue except for one or two deposits. Therefore, it is difficult to create programming around no resources. Finally, Director Bury provided the organization numbers and descriptors that were requested.

Concluding Remarks

Chair Renner reminded Councilmembers to submit questions for the next Finance Committee meeting.

Mayor Jadwin thanked members of Parks & Recreation staff for their attendance, noting that they begin their days early in the morning but wanted to be present to support Director Ferrell in the budget discussion.

Recommendation: Held in Committee; Further Discussion Scheduled in Finance Committee on 11/24/2025.

C. ADJOURNMENT:

There being no further business before the Finance Committee, the Chair noted the meeting was adjourned at 9:19 p.m.

Jeremy A. VanMeter
Clerk of Council

*APPROVED by the Finance Committee, this
day of 2025.*

Stephen A. Renner