City of Gahanna

200 South Hamilton Road
Gahanna, Ohio 43230

Meeting Minutes

Committee of the Whole

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

Jeremy A. VanMeter, Clerk of Council

Monday, June 23, 2025 | **7:00 PM** | **City Hall, Council Chambers**

A. CALL TO ORDER:

Gahanna City Council met for Committee of the Whole on Monday, June 23, 2025, in Council Chambers. Vice President of Council Trenton I. Weaver, Chair, called the meeting to order at 7:03 p.m. The agenda was published on June 20, 2025. Councilmember Kaylee Padova was absent from the meeting. All other members were present for the meeting.

Vice President Weaver noted that the Committee would swap the order of items B. and C. on the agenda, with Items from the Department of Economic Development discussed first, followed by Presentations.

B. ITEMS FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT:

Returning for Further Discussion; Introduction/First Reading Held 6.16.2025

ORD-0030-2025 AN ORDINANCE AUTHORIZING THE MAYOR TO ENTER INTO A COMMUNITY REINVESTMENT AREA AGREEMENT WITH VELOCIS GAHANNA JV, LP TO FACILITATE THE CONSTRUCTION OF AN INDUSTRIAL BUILDING ON PARCELS 027-000110-00 AND 025-13634-00 ON TECH CENTER DRIVE, PART OF COMMUNITY REINVESTMENT AREA #3; AND DECLARING AN EMERGENCY

Mr. Nate Green of the Montrose Group, serving as the City's economic development consultant, addressed Council to discuss the KBC Velocis project. He explained that this project involved the development of a speculative industrial building the City had discussed previously. Mr. Green noted that Economic Development Director Jeff Gottke had reviewed the project with Council a few weeks earlier but was on vacation, so Mr. Green had come in his place. He intended to highlight information the Council had already heard and then introduce members of the development team to speak about the project and the requested tax abatement. He stated the building would be approximately 140,000 to 141,000 square feet, with hard construction costs estimated at $13.5 million. The project was expected to create 37 new jobs, though as a speculative development, there was no end user currently identified. The developer had agreed to a minimum of 37 jobs, and if they fell below that number, they would need to make a payment to the City to offset the lost revenue.

Mr. Green described the site as long vacant. He emphasized the City's need for this type of project and reminded Council of the return-on-investment calculations they had seen. He said that, even with the requested 80%, 12-year tax abatement, the overall return on investment for the community was 69%. He noted the City itself would abate approximately $300,000 in inside millage but would receive about $600,000 in income tax over the period, effectively doubling the City's return. Mr. Green also spoke about the market need for speculative industrial space. He explained that Gahanna had had successful speculative industrial projects in the past but had lost 22 leads from One Columbus and JobsOhio over the past two years due to the lack of suitable space. He observed that the market had shifted over his 25 years in economic development from companies wanting land to wanting move-in-ready buildings for speed to market. He stressed that the need for speculative industrial space was even greater now than in recent years. He further noted the importance of maintaining a diversity of jobs in the City, which this building could help support. He also explained that the emergency clause originally included in the legislation was no longer necessary because KBC had worked out the timing issues with the land seller. He stated that this change aligned with Council's request at the prior meeting. He then invited questions from Council and introduced Jonathan Postweiler of KBC Advisors. He mentioned that Mr. Postweiler was based in Chicago.

Mr. Jonathan Postweiler, Development Manager with KBC Advisors in Chicago, explained that thanks to the City's technology, he had watched the meeting two weeks earlier and understood the questions that had been raised. He shared that he had been with KBC Advisors for four years, focused entirely on industrial development. He explained the project was a joint venture between KBC and Velocis, a private equity firm based in Dallas, Texas. Their local leasing broker in Columbus, Beau Taggart, spoke at the June 9, 2025, Committee of the Whole meeting. While the development team was based in Chicago, they were combining local resources and national capital for the Gahanna project. Mr. Postweiler described the partnership's track record, noting they had developed over 4.5 million square feet in Texas (in three cities), as well as in Arizona and Chicago. He said they were now expanding in the Midwest, starting with Gahanna, and planned to continue in Ohio and other Midwestern states, as well as on the East and West Coasts. He addressed questions raised at the earlier meeting about the site's organizational structure and constraints. He explained that a storm sanitary easement bisected the site east to west in the northern third, reducing usable land from 10 acres to about 8.3 acres. Additional challenges included fill material left from the construction of Tech Center Drive, which increased costs, and an ephemeral stream requiring rerouting and repiping. He also noted that a walking trail easement on the south and east sides of the property pinched the site east-west, while the sanitary easement pinched it north-south, creating significant constraints. Mr. Postweiler stated that these constraints added costs that the development team could absorb with the proposed tax abatement. He reiterated that, as a speculative development without an identified tenant, they needed to build a flexible facility to attract a range of users, including manufacturers, warehouse operators, and flex office tenants. He explained that their local broker had provided 20 to 30 recent lease comparables indicating the market rents they needed to achieve, which would only be feasible with the requested 12-year, 80% property tax abatement. He concluded by inviting any questions Council members might have.

President Bowers thanked the presenters for their work and the additional context. She expressed her appreciation to Mr. Green and Mr. Postweiler. She said she wanted to ensure the Council “level set” the conversation, noting that remarks made at the last regular Council meeting needed clarification. She stated there was mutual respect for the development team and for professionals with experience in these areas. President Bowers emphasized that this respect did not negate Council’s duty to vet and thoroughly review projects. She explained that each Councilmember brought lived experience, research experience, and educational experience to their role. She stressed the importance of appreciating the contributions of partners, companies, and property owners, while making clear that Council’s questions were intended to evaluate projects on behalf of the community from a holistic perspective. She then said she had a couple of questions, the first being about the timeline for the property. She noted there had been comments about the site being on the market for an extended period but highlighted two major changes in recent years: rezoning and a lot split in 2022. She asked for clarification about when the lot split had occurred.

Jordan Fromm, representing the property owner/seller, Value Recovery Group (VRG), responded. He explained that there had never been a lot split. Instead, there had always been two separate parcels. The lot line had been moved to adjust for Burns and Scalo, who acquired less land than they originally intended to purchase. He added that although the parcels had always been separate, they had been marketed together when VRG acquired the sites and built Tech Center Drive. He also noted that the City had worked with them during that time in an effort to attract Bob Evans.

President Bowers thanked Mr. Fromm for clarifying that point. She explained she had wanted to be sure she understood, because Mr. Griffith had said during his previous remarks (June 16, 2025) that the property had been split into an 18-acre piece, which he had claimed enabled the development in recent years. She then asked another question, noting that since the development team was based out of town, she wanted to know how they had identified this site and decided it was a project they wanted to pursue.

Mr. Postweiler explained that, from a macroeconomic standpoint, Chicago was one of the largest logistics markets in the country, the second largest, and that his team spent significant time and effort there. Because Columbus was geographically close to their office, they wanted to identify other markets that were well-suited for development under their expertise. He said that Columbus was one of those markets, based on economic indicators, vacancy rates, absorption, and tenant demand, which they began to study in 2021 and 2022. He noted there had been an oversupply of bulk product in Columbus, particularly in the Rickenbacker market, which had scared some capital away from Columbus development. However, the specific subsector size of 100,000 to 150,000 square feet had seen tenant demand. Mr. Postweiler said their analysis showed that the ten most recent developments in the northeast submarket leased up in an average of just under two quarters, about 5.1 months, indicating strong demand for that product type in that location. That demand, coupled with leasing comparables provided by their local broker, Beau Taggart, confirmed tenant demand for the area in their desired size range. He explained that Beau and his team had then identified the site, which Bob Lockett had been marketing on behalf of VRG, and brought it to KBC's attention, which led them to pursue the project.

President Bowers asked Mr. Postweiler about the typical duration of leases for these types of industrial tenants. Mr. Postweiler replied that the typical lease duration ranged from seven to ten years. President Bowers asked if those leases generally included options to renew. Mr. Postweiler confirmed that most leases included two five-year options to extend. President Bowers then asked if companies tended to exercise those options. Mr. Postweiler said that, most often, they did. President Bowers asked what happened when the abatement expired, specifically whether tenants' rent would increase dramatically. Mr. Postweiler acknowledged it was a good question and identified it as a broader challenge in the Columbus market. He explained that, for example, a Class B building built in 2002 with 28-foot clear height and 1,000 amps of power might cost a tenant $3.50 per square foot in property taxes. Tenants focused on their gross rent, the all-in rent payment. When the abatement ended, landlords needed to lower the base rent portion to keep the gross rent competitive. He illustrated this by explaining that if the market gross rent was $10 per square foot, the landlord could only charge $7 for base rent if $3 was going toward taxes. In their specific underwriting case, the gross rent was $11 per foot, with $9 per foot in base rent and just over a dollar in operating expenses for insurance and other costs. Without the abatement, they would need to lower base rents from about $9.75 to $7.75 per foot, making the project infeasible for them or any developer given their required returns. Mr. Postweiler went on to explain that when abatements expired, companies in older buildings would compare their current rent to the rent in newer, higher-quality buildings. For about the same gross rent, they would often choose to move into the better product. Older buildings would then be backfilled at lower rents by other companies. President Bowers asked if KBC and Velocis would own the property when the abatement expired. Mr. Postweiler said that most likely, KBC and Velocis would not be the owners at that time. President Bowers then asked who would rent at the lower rate and absorb the increased taxes when the abatement ended. Mr.

Postweiler clarified that KBC and Velocis would serve as the developer and initial owner, leasing the space to one to three unidentified tenants who would pay rent. He explained that those tenants would have staggered lease terms of seven, ten, or twelve years, meaning different parts of the building would become vacant at various times. Their local broker, Beau Taggart, would be responsible for re-leasing the space to new tenants. He added that regardless of whether KBC and Velocis or another institutional owner held the property at that point, the process would be the same as elsewhere in the market, with brokers marketing the space and securing new tenants as vacancies occurred.

President Bowers expressed her appreciation for the historical context and for Mr. Postweiler explaining the relationship between KBC and Velocis. She confirmed that he had described their relationship as spanning about four and a half years and asked whether they still owned all of the properties they had developed together. Mr. Postweiler said he did not know the exact answer but estimated they still owned all but two or three of the roughly 14 or 15 buildings they had developed together. President Bowers asked Mr. Postweiler approximately how long they would expect to hold the property before selling it. Mr. Postweiler explained that the timing was highly market-specific and depended on economic conditions. He said that with recent interest rate increases, it was less advantageous for the partnership to sell. If interest rates fell and cap rates lowered, increasing building values, the partnership would be more likely to exit more properties. In the meantime, they planned to hold, own, and operate the properties while leasing them to tenants.

Mr. Green added that another possibility existed: if they secured a single tenant for the building, that tenant might choose to buy the property outright. He noted that this could happen either soon after occupancy or three to five years later. He described the market as fluid, with many companies needing this kind of space. Mr. Green explained that such a scenario could involve three tenants with leases rolling over to new tenants over time, or a single user buying and occupying the space for the long term. Mr. Green said their hope was for that kind of outcome, a company buying the building and staying in Gahanna for years. From an economic development perspective, he said the goal was to help local companies grow into the space and remain in the community or to attract new companies that would move in, grow, and stay in Gahanna. He noted it would also be beneficial if multiple companies in the building grew enough to need larger spaces elsewhere in Gahanna, allowing the City to backfill the original space with new businesses. President Bowers agreed and said she appreciated that vision. She mentioned that Council had heard success stories from other companies in the industrial district, such as ADB Safegate, but cautioned that there was still a risk. She noted the gamble was that tenants could vacate when the abatement expired, move to newer projects offering better rents, and leave behind a warehouse out of step with market demand. Mr. Green acknowledged that this outcome was possible and said he could not deny it. However, he pointed to the Rickenbacker area, which had experienced multiple cycles of abatements rolling off and ownership changes while maintaining a very low vacancy rate. He emphasized that many of those buildings were even larger bulk warehouses. Mr. Green said Gahanna also had important advantages, including strong economic activity in the Columbus region, proximity to major highways such as I-270 and 670, and its location near the airport. He highlighted the City's excellent access to workforce within five miles, which made it appealing to companies looking to locate in the area. President Bowers responded that she understood those points and agreed with the benefits, but said her concern remained valid. Mr. Green acknowledged that concern and pointed out that from a financial perspective, the tax abatement was essential because Gahanna competed with other communities offering similar incentives. He noted that the City of Columbus provided comparable abatements and that communities south of Gahanna often offered even more generous terms, such as 100% abatements for 15 years. He emphasized that while Gahanna was not proposing 100%, the tax abatement was necessary given Ohio's high property taxes and the need to attract new capital. Mr. Postweiler added to Mr. Green's comments, describing the facility as a "Swiss Army knife" of industrial buildings. He explained that the building was designed to be highly flexible, with the ability to add more dock positions, trailer parking, and electrical capacity suitable for manufacturing. It also featured appropriate clear height for racking and floor thickness for manufacturing uses, along with multiple office entry options to accommodate spaces from 5,000 to 30,000 square feet, including two-story configurations. Mr. Postweiler contrasted this with a highly specialized build-to-suit or corporate headquarters facility, which would be difficult to re-lease if vacated. He said their speculative facility was designed to accommodate nearly any industrial user, mitigating the risk of ending up with an empty building. Mr. Green concluded by describing it as a high-tech, Class A industrial facility developed by an experienced industrial developer, which was exactly what the City wanted to attract.

President Bowers stated she wanted to follow-up on a point Mr. Green had begun to discuss, noting that high property taxes in Ohio required the City to use tax abatements as a routine development tool. She said one of her concerns involved a practice called "drop and swap." She mentioned she had hoped Mr. Underhill could address this, as he would likely be familiar with the term. Mr. Aaron Underhill, counsel for the applicant, confirmed that he was familiar with the term. Mr. Green asked President Bowers to clarify what she meant by "drop and swap." President Bowers invited Mr. Underhill to explain, suggesting he could do a better job. Mr. Underhill explained that a "drop and swap" was a situation where the property, immediately before being sold, would be transferred into an LLC, a single-purpose entity. That LLC itself would then be purchased, allowing the transaction to avoid appearing in the County's records. He said this practice could prevent the increase in land value from being recognized for tax purposes. President Bowers confirmed that was her concern, explaining that the unabated land value would not be recorded if the membership interest in the LLC changed hands. Mr. Green responded that such a practice would not occur in this case. He clarified that the base value, which was not subject to abatement, would remain on the tax rolls. Mr. Postweiler added that the entity developing and owning the property would also be the entity purchasing the land. Mr. Green confirmed that the ownership entity already existed. Mr. Postweiler specified that the ownership entity was “Velocis Gahanna JV.” Mr. Underhill stated definitively, for the record, that such a “drop and swap” transaction would not occur for this parcel. He explained that any future sale would have to be reported on the required DTE form, he believed it was Form 24, which would document the sale value for the county. He said the County Auditor would accept that sale price as the market value, ensuring the base value would reset. He emphasized that everyone currently receiving tax payments would continue to receive them, and the new valuation would generate additional tax revenue. Mr. Green agreed with that explanation. President Bowers thanked them for clarifying and confirming that the “drop and swap” practice would not occur on this parcel.

President Bowers then turned to Mr. Underhill with another question, referencing concerns raised two weeks earlier about which entity would be liable for the income tax guarantee. She asked him to clarify that point. Mr. Underhill explained that the liability would fall to the ownership entity. He said they had negotiated the assignment language in the agreement carefully to ensure that if his client’s entity sold the property, the benefit of the abatement would transfer to the buyer, but so would the obligations. He stated that any future buyer would remain contractually obligated to the City to fulfill the terms of the agreement, giving the City a breach of contract claim if the buyer failed to comply. Mr. Green confirmed that it would always be the entity owning the building that held that liability. President Bowers thanked them for the clarification and said that concluded her questions.

Councilmember Schnetzer noted that the document he had requested at the previous Committee meeting had been sent to all Councilmembers and was now included in the attachments. He referred specifically to the file titled “Incentive ROI Calculator KBC” dated June 17, 2025. He explained that it included the detail he had asked for, showing the revenue to the City separately from the revenue to the broader community. He identified that figure on the spreadsheet as $619,777. Councilmember Schnetzer asked what the risk was that this number would not materialize. Mr. Green replied that as part of the agreement, the developer had guaranteed at least the minimum amount of income tax. He said there was very little risk, because whoever owned the building would have to make up the difference if they did not have 37 employees generating that payroll. Councilmember Schnetzer acknowledged that uncertainty existed about the economy. He asked if, should the jobs fail to materialize, the owners would be on the hook or if there would be a rollback of the abatement. Mr. Green confirmed they would be on the hook for the payment if the jobs did not materialize. Councilmember Schnetzer then asked about the Tax Increment Financing (TIF) payments. Mr. Green said that whatever property taxes were owed would also be the responsibility of the owner. Mr. Underhill noted that the TIF could be confusing. He emphasized that his client and the property owner were not asking for any TIF dollars. He explained that whether the City chose to place a TIF on top of the abatement was its own decision but made clear the applicant was not requesting any revenues be returned to them. Councilmember Schnetzer thanked Mr. Underhill and explained he was simply referencing the spreadsheet and the label in the cell. Mr. Green clarified that those “service payments” Councilmember Schnetzer referenced were payments the property owner would have to make as part of their property tax bill. He said that whoever owned the building would be responsible for paying them. Councilmember Schnetzer confirmed that the $619,777 figure was therefore a minimum amount and asked if they were reasonably assured it would materialize. Mr. Green said they were assured of receiving at least that amount and expressed hope that the City would ultimately receive even more.

Councilmember Renner thanked everyone for the discussion so far. He acknowledged hearing Mr. Green and others describe the project as a high-tech or “Swiss Army knife” facility, but noted his concern that no tenants had yet been identified despite an 80% abatement request. He asked for clarification on what a high-tech facility would include and what types of businesses the developers planned to attract. He also made clear that while he understood there was some confidential deal-making, he still wanted enough detail to understand what would go into the facility. Mr. Postweiler thanked Councilmember Renner for the question and explained they had not yet identified a tenant because they had not fully launched the marketing campaign. The property had been softly marketed by their broker to a few groups but had not been broadly promoted because they had not yet closed on the land and the development hinged on approvals still pending. He noted that industry standards meant tenants typically looked for new space only six to nine months in advance, while this project had been under contract since September 2024 without yet breaking ground. He explained the process to build the facility was lengthy, but tenants’ search timelines were much shorter, driving the speculative nature of the development. Regarding what made it a high-tech facility, Mr. Postweiler described it as a modern industrial space with 32-foot clear height allowing eight pallet positions. It would feature modern LED lighting, ESFR fire suppression systems suitable for materials not permitted in older facilities, and 3,000 amps of power to the building with 3,500 amps to the site. The site would have six EV charging stations and could add more power for advanced manufacturing uses. He identified their main competition as the New Albany submarket, with much of its development tied to the chip manufacturing plant there. He explained their investment thesis relied on the area’s highway access, labor pool, proximity to downtown Columbus, and the airport. They viewed the building as a fit for companies supplementing the technology boom in New Albany. He defined a high-tech user as one engaged in advanced manufacturing, combining assembly, equipment, racking, truck docks, trailer parking, and over 110 auto parking spaces. He added that while they were committing to 37 jobs, their goal was to secure a single advanced manufacturing tenant bringing 100 or more jobs to the community. Mr. Green added that the area had missed out on some JobsOhio leads due to a lack of available space. He listed sectors such as pharmaceutical manufacturing, food processing, advanced automotive and aerospace manufacturing, and freezer/cooler manufacturing as industries that could potentially occupy the facility. Mr. Underhill said he had been involved in development in New Albany and noted the size of this project raised questions about its speculative nature. He explained that the facility would not attract large corporations like Amazon or Google but would serve successful small and medium-sized businesses. These businesses typically lacked the experience or long planning horizon to develop their own real estate and wanted move-in-ready space so they could focus on their core operations. He emphasized that this was the opportunity before the Council: to serve companies with immediate needs that could not build facilities themselves, providing a niche to benefit Gahanna and surrounding areas.

Councilmember Renner responded that he had a long history of supporting development and understood the developers' perspective. He observed they were developing a small acreage in a creative way, but noted the city had been pushing to build up that area. He then asked about their approach to stormwater management, specifically whether they would manage stormwater by letting it infiltrate directly rather than routing it through pipes. Mr. Postweiler thanked him for the question and clarified he was not a civil engineer but could explain the basics. He said that when he mentioned storm drainage costs, he referred to the need to handle off-site stormwater discharge that had historically run through their property for over 40 years, creating a ditch due to a likely failed drain tile from the 1950s. To build their facility as planned, they would need to repipe that overflow drainage west along Tech Center's north side, then north along their west property line, and finally down to the creek within the conservation easement. He explained that this repiping would strictly manage off-site water, while all rainwater falling on their own site would be contained in on-site detention ponds and released safely per engineering code. Councilmember Renner said that somewhat answered his question, but he wanted to know, using that framework, how the facility would address broader concerns about energy and transportation. Mr. Postweiler said that the facility benefited from nearby public transportation and a walking path. He explained that in terms of energy efficiency, the facility would feature LED lighting, high-efficiency HVAC units, and compliance with modern national standards. They were also exploring the possibility of LEED certification, though that depended on financial feasibility. Councilmember Renner pressed further, asking about solar power, battery storage, and similar measures that were becoming increasingly important. Mr. Postweiler replied that one advantage of their flexible building design was that these features could be added later. He offered an example from Chicago, where they had considered retrofitting an older building with rainwater recapture and solar panels. He explained that while some tenants opposed rooftop solar due to roof penetrations and potential leaks, especially manufacturers with sensitive processes, these remained viable options if financially feasible. Councilmember Renner suggested that as a building owner they could also consider a public-private partnership to purchase only renewable power. Mr. Postweiler said that was potentially an option but admitted he did not know enough to speak about it further at that time.

President Bowers asked Mr. Postweiler whether, of the 14 projects he had mentioned with Velocis, any had sought LEED certification. Mr. Postweiler replied that at least a few of them had received LEED certification. President Bowers then asked what level of LEED certification those projects had achieved. Mr. Postweiler said he did not know the exact levels. He clarified that the partnership included KBC and Velocis nationally, with different development teams handling projects in Texas, Arizona, and the Midwest. He explained he knew general details such as project overviews, square footage, and investment amounts, but not the specific LEED certification levels. President Bowers asked if he knew how the cost of LEED certification was factored into the project’s financial planning. Mr. Postweiler explained that for this project, preliminary figures showed LEED certification to be relatively expensive. He said that cost fell to the developer, who would need to charge higher rent to make it viable. He described the decision as depending on whether tenants valued LEED certification enough to pay an extra 5, 10, or 20 cents per square foot, and whether the developer was willing to take that risk. President Bowers noted that this was a good point and asked whether, in the cases where they had pursued LEED certification, they had done so with a specific tenant in mind who valued it. Mr. Postweiler said those projects had been speculative in nature, just like this one. President Bowers then asked what would make them decide to make that investment in LEED for this project. Mr. Postweiler explained that if the market rents increased significantly, citing an example of $12 per square foot plus an 80% tax abatement, they could afford to charge an extra dollar per square foot. That higher rent would allow them to justify the additional investment in the building for things like LEED certification or other architectural features. President Bowers asked if that would increase the value of the building. Mr. Postweiler replied that in some cases it would. President Bowers then asked whether, when the abatement expired, the resulting higher building value would lead to a greater tax burden for the ultimate property owner. Mr. Postweiler said it was difficult to predict something twelve years out but speculated that if the assessor valued the building higher when the abatement ended, it would result in higher costs to the tenants.

Vice President Weaver said he appreciated the additional context and presentation. He specifically thanked the presenters for addressing concerns about the LLC drop-and-swap issue. He explained that, in his role with the county auditor’s office, this was a frequent concern in development projects, particularly for the affected school districts, and he found it reassuring to know it was off the table. He also expressed gratitude for the additional details about the project, saying it provided a broader picture that helped everyone better understand it. Regarding the income tax guarantee, he appreciated the clarification that any subsequent owner would remain responsible for it. He added that his understanding was that City Attorney Tamilarasan supported the language in the agreement. Vice President Weaver noted that, although the legislation had originally included a request for emergency passage, he appreciated the clarification that this was no longer needed. He confirmed with Clerk VanMeter that the legislation would need to be amended at the July 7, 2025, meeting to remove the emergency language. After receiving that confirmation, he stated that the item was currently slated for the regular agenda on July 7, 2025.

Recommendation: Second Reading/Adoption on Regular Agenda on 7.7.2025; Amendment requested to remove Emergency Declaration.

C. PRESENTATIONS:

1. Department of Public Service Update

2025-0135 Department of Public Service Presentation Slides 6.23.2025

Director of Public Service Shawn Anverse thanked the Council for making time for him and members of his leadership team to share updates on their work over the past half-year. He began by presenting the department's organizational chart, which included six divisions. He introduced several members of his leadership team so Council could associate faces with names. He introduced Kyle Allen as the Street Superintendent and Matt Jones as the Utility Superintendent. He then introduced Adam Grove, the newest member of the leadership team having recently been promoted to Facility Superintendent, who would oversee the new building. Next, he introduced Jennifer Hamilton, who oversaw programs, compliance, and project management. Finally, he introduced Derek Casper, who manages the Customer Service Division. He also noted that Darren Arnett, the Fleet Superintendent, was unable to attend because he was at a working conference.

Director Anverse began by describing the Customer Service Division, led by Derek Casper. He reported that the division created and sent over 10,000 water bills each month and had handled a little over 10,000 calls to date for 2025. They also managed all shelter and facility rentals, assisted with parks and recreation signups, shelter houses, and programming. He then described the Facilities Division, which at the time consisted solely of Adam Grove. Anverse explained that Adam handled all facilities either by contract or personally. These included City Hall, the Police Department, the Service Garage, Fleet Garage, Senior Center, and Creekside Garage. He said Adam managed everything from replacing light bulbs to fixing vandalism and highlighted several projects, such as work on fleet garage doors, backflow certifications, and frequent coordination with the Fire Department for inspections. Anverse praised Adam for his early-morning commitment and excellent performance. Next, Director Anverse discussed the Service Division, which maintained over 325 lane miles of streets. He shared winter operation statistics, noting that staff had plowed over 7,000 lane miles, used over 900 tons of salt, and applied over 6,000 gallons of brine during what he described as a medium or mild winter. He emphasized their proactive approach to forecasting and staffing to ensure safe travel for residents. He then shifted to the Utilities Division, reporting that it maintained over 187 miles of water mains. He highlighted the resumption of the meter replacement upgrade program in 2025, noting that they had already replaced over 360 meters, many of which had failed batteries or other issues. He also mentioned they had addressed over 14 water main breaks so far, praising staff for responding at all hours, even during freezing temperatures.

Director Anverse outlined several projects, many of which fell under Jennifer Hamilton's management. He described their leak detection work with Asterra Satellite, a company from California that identified underground water leaks via satellite imaging. He recounted that the company claimed to have found water on Mars, which, while unverified, had piqued their interest. The project had been successful so far, with the team confirming and repairing leaks on both private and city property. He noted that minimizing water loss was critical for the city given its master meter system. He explained that after initial repairs, they planned a second satellite pass in the fall to identify any remaining or new leaks. He also mentioned EPA reporting, highlighting the Consumer Confidence Report (CCR) written by Jennifer Hamilton. He praised Jennifer's exceptional work, sharing that the Ohio EPA had used her report as a statewide example at a conference, which he called a great honor for her. Director Anverse discussed additional projects, including streetlight painting and traffic signal replacements. He noted they had already completed traffic signal replacement at US 62 and Stygler Road intersections, and planned to rebuild the traffic signal at the intersection of North Hamilton and Gatsby's restaurant in 2025. He added they were working to address timing issues at traffic signals, with plans to purchase new detection cameras to improve signal timing.

Vice President Weaver asked Director Anverse a question before he continued. Weaver explained that in his ward, several HOAs had interconnected water features, such as ponds, and had asked about mitigating flooding. He noted he had heard the principle that "what happens upstream impacts downstream" and wanted to know whether that concern fell under the department's EPA reporting or who coordinated that work, mentioning that Engineering or even the Army Corps of Engineers might be involved. Director Anverse responded that in his two and a half years with the city, he had not had any dialogue about flooding from ponds specifically. He suggested that Engineering or Parks might be better points of contact but offered to look into it and get back to Weaver. Vice President Weaver thanked him and said he was happy to reach out to them as well.

Director Anverse continued his presentation by discussing operational changes the department had made in recent years. He explained that they had re-evaluated which services to perform in-house versus contracting out. He noted that the department had recently acquired a new street sweeper, which staff had been using on highly visible roads, especially in preparation for events like the Creekside Blues and Jazz Festival and the Fourth of July. He explained that starting July 1, 2025, they would implement what he called a "live program" for street sweeping, dividing the city into five zones with roughly equal mileage. Residents would be able to track the schedule online by hovering over their area to see when sweeping was planned. He said the program had already received many compliments from residents, and staff were becoming familiar with the new machine's capabilities.

Councilmember Schnetzer thanked Anverse for the information and asked if the street sweeper had been purchased with Issue 12 funds. Anverse replied that he believed so. Senior Deputy Director Corey Wybensinger added that the funding for the street sweeper was a mix, with a heavy portion coming from stormwater funds to help keep debris out of the stormwater system, along with some capital funding.

Director Anverse then talked about pavement marking. He noted that recent thermoplastic pavement marking work had been contracted through the Engineering Department, but the Service Department was now performing in-house "touchup" work. This included residential streets, school zones, park entrances, pools, and high-pedestrian areas. The in-house work involved spray painting, applying glass beads, and primarily focused on crosswalks and stop bars. He emphasized that in previous years, this work would have been entirely contracted out. He also described their new in-house sign shop. Previously, the city had to order signs from a contractor, which delayed replacements. Now, with a shop at the service garage, trained staff could make signs themselves, including stop signs and any needed for Parks and Recreation. He reported they had made 40 signs so far in 2025. Director Anverse added that they had begun doing some small-scale concrete work in-house, rather than waiting to collect four or five jobs before calling a contractor. He clarified that these were minor repairs, such as replacing a single slab or curb sections damaged during maintenance, rather than long stretches of sidewalk. He then discussed the Fleet Division, which serviced over 450 pieces of equipment ranging from weed eaters to dump trucks and loaders. He credited Senior Deputy Director Wybensinger and Fleet Superintendent Darren Arnett for their focus on "right-sizing" the fleet by prioritizing need over want. He noted this approach had improved their ability to get the right equipment. He highlighted the purchase of a crash attenuator for crew safety on high-traffic roads, describing how it provided critical protection during work like pothole patching. He explained it featured a solar panel and an arrow board that could be raised when in use. Anverse then listed some of the vehicles purchased for 2025, including the street sweeper, two salt dump trucks (replacing 19-year-old units), and golf carts. He explained they planned to buy ten golf carts each year over five years to complete a full replacement. He also discussed sustainability efforts. He noted their shred and e-recycling event at City Hall had been the most attended yet, with over 830 cars participating. He described the upcoming household hazardous waste disposal event, held in partnership with SWACO and a contractor, EEI, calling it a strong countywide collaboration. He also mentioned the city's ongoing work to replace streetlights with LEDs whenever one burned out, 138 in 2024 and 85 so far in 2025. Jennifer Hamilton's team had also been researching solar streetlights. He acknowledged they likely worked better in sunnier climates but said the city was exploring the possibility. Anverse concluded by showing photos of department events. One depicted their annual snow and ice equipment inspection held in mid-October or November to catch mechanical issues before winter storms. Another photo showed their first-ever truck rodeo from the previous year, where CDL drivers competed in an obstacle course and received a trophy.

Councilmember Schnetzer thanked Director Anverse and the department, especially the “weather warriors” who handled snow plowing. He praised the service, noting he could always tell where the city limits were on his commute by the difference in road conditions.

Vice President Weaver brought up two items. First, he referred to a concern logged in the Gahanna 311 system about the location of a stop bar at Crossing Creek South. He said overgrown shrubbery obstructed views of cross traffic and wanted to highlight the issue again. Senior Director of Operations Kevin Schultz responded that this was a Parks and Recreation matter because of the tree trimming. He explained that Parks, Engineering, and Service had reviewed it and determined the clear zone met the required distance, so they did not believe additional work was warranted. Vice President Weaver thanked him for the update and then mentioned the roundabout at Clark State and Hamilton. He explained that as drivers traveled south on Hamilton into the roundabout, the stop bar’s location caused drivers not to yield properly. He said he had received requests to move the stop bar farther north and acknowledged it was an engineering and public safety matter. Mayor Jadwin confirmed it was an engineering issue. She noted she and Weaver had discussed it before and that Engineering was looking into what, if anything, could be done. Vice President Weaver thanked everyone and, seeing nothing further for the presentation and discussion, he expressed his appreciation for the update and for the department’s work.

2. Department of Planning Update

2025-0136 Department of Planning Presentation Slides 6.23.2025

Director of Planning Michael Blackford presented a mid-year update on the work of the Department of Planning. He began by showing the department’s organizational chart, explaining that it consisted of three divisions: the Building Division, the Code Enforcement Division, and the Zoning Division. He noted that the department had 11 total staff members, 10 full-time and one part-time, with over 115 years of combined Gahanna-related experience. Blackford said he had 11 and a half years himself, putting him fifth in seniority in the department. He then discussed the Building Division. He began with accomplishments, highlighting the permitting software implementation. He explained it had been about one year since the division switched software, six months in 2024 and six months in 2025. He said this was a major change for any department but especially impactful for the Building Division because nearly all their work (permits, inspections, and reports) depended on that software. Blackford clarified that the apparent drop in the number of permits and inspections shown in the data, from 1,300 to 257, was due to differences in how the old and new systems calculated and displayed data, not an actual drop in activity. He said permit volume remained steady year over year. He explained that one of the biggest improvements from the new software was its ability to let applicants check the status of their permit online. He said the most common question the department used to receive was, “What’s the status of my permit?” but that had almost disappeared. However, new questions had emerged, especially about scheduling inspections and resubmitting plans online. He said the department was working to educate and support customers on those elements. Blackford also discussed how the new system improved the scheduling of inspections. He explained that residents could call by 3 p.m. on Monday and expect an inspection on Tuesday, describing this quick turnaround as possible because of the improved software. He credited City Council’s previous approval to hire an in-house inspector, shown in a presentation photo, along with third-party contractors, for allowing the city to be one of the most responsive communities in the region.

Turning to the Code Enforcement Division, Blackford said the number of cases in 2024 and 2025 was on the same trajectory as previous years. Although he could not provide the exact number of inspections in the new software, he said they historically averaged three to four inspections per case, meaning they had performed about 2,000 inspections so far this year. He said many cases involved “frequent flyers” with recurring issues, rather than new problems. The most common complaints at this time of year included tall grass and weeds, trash, and debris. He also noted they received calls about issues technically handled by the police, such as blocked sidewalks, parked cars, and noise complaints. He explained that while residents often asked the department to handle these, they had to refer them to the police. Blackford highlighted a major recent accomplishment: the introduction of warrants for scofflaws. He described it as a significant effort that took time and collaboration with the legal office and the Clerk of Courts. He explained that code enforcement officers could not directly force compliance but could cite violators and move through the legal process. Previously, many offenders ignored Mayor’s Court, leading to a cycle of noncompliance. With the new warrant process, they had successfully gained compliance in cases where violators had ignored the city for years. He shared an example of someone who had been unresponsive for over five years but complied after discovering they could not renew their driver’s license due to the warrant.

President Bowers asked whether the department could enforce code on commercially owned properties. Blackford confirmed they could. He explained that most complaints involved residential properties, but they did enforce code on commercial properties as well. He said their main touchpoints with commercial property owners included requiring pothole patching after winter and addressing issues such as temporary signage and poorly maintained dumpsters. President Bowers asked if there were any obstacles unique to code enforcement on commercial properties. Blackford replied that he could not recall anything making commercial enforcement inherently easier or harder. He said it often came down to the responsiveness of individual property owners, noting that some were easier to work with than others.

Councilmember Jones asked about how the city identified violations, mentioning that some people on social media claimed the city drove around looking for them. She asked whether most violations came from resident reports or from staff proactively looking. Blackford explained that the city's approach was both proactive and reactive, estimating roughly two-thirds of cases were proactive, though he wasn't certain which category was larger. Councilmember Jones then asked whether there was a consistent rule about how many times staff tried to contact a violator before moving to the warrant process, or whether it was case by case. Blackford said it was generally case by case. He noted the warrant process had only been used a few times so far. He emphasized that the goal of code enforcement was not fines or revenue but achieving compliance. He said staff always tried to use the approach that would best lead to compliance, recognizing that different people responded better to different tactics.

Director Blackford continued the presentation, focusing on Planning and Zoning. Blackford reported that in 2024 the city had approved 210,000 square feet of development. As of two weeks prior, Planning Commission had approved three new developments bringing the 2025 total to 209,000 square feet, virtually the same as the previous year. He noted, however, that while there had been 196 residential units approved in 2024, there had been none so far in 2025. He shared that the most frequent question his department received by far was, "When is my hearing date?" He described one project that went through the process for six to eight months, during which they tracked over three dozen times that question was asked, despite the department having clear flowcharts explaining the process. He noted that even though the department did not set hearing dates (it only described the process), external customers remained focused on that timeline question. He contrasted this with other common questions like "What are my setbacks?" which were also frequent but less persistent.

Director Blackford described the department's accomplishments, particularly the implementation of new permitting software and the adoption of a new zoning code. He said these were significant, long-term projects aimed at streamlining processes and making them more efficient. He explained that with the new software and code, the department was better able to respond to customer questions and refine its procedures, including minor changes like updating terminology and major changes such as rewriting the zoning code itself. He emphasized that while the department continually worked to improve and streamline processes, the ultimate pace of an application depended largely on the external customer. He explained that typically, only about one day in five of an application's lifecycle was in the city's hands. On average, 80-85% of the timeline was due to the applicant's work. He gave an example of how a 20,000-square-foot warehouse project might move through Planning Commission in two months, while another project might take two years, usually due to differences in the professionalism and preparedness of applicants.

Looking ahead, Blackford outlined 2025 priorities that could affect the city's budget. He said they were evaluating whether the Land Use Plan needed revision, which would be part of a future budget request. He also noted that as the city grew more sophisticated in addressing floodplain and floodway issues, mostly governed by federal rules, complex projects might require additional third-party consulting, which could also affect future budget planning. He closed by reiterating the department's ongoing commitment to refining the zoning code to keep it responsive, streamlined, and reflective of community priorities.

President Bowers thanked Director Blackford for the update and for previewing potential 2026 priorities. She noted there had been much discussion around zoning code changes last year, especially related to regional housing trends, and asked if the city had seen many accessory dwelling unit (ADU) requests. Blackford replied that although there had been interest and discussion during the code adoption process, they had anticipated one or two applications but had actually received none. He said he did not recall staff getting any calls about ADUs so far. President Bowers then asked about a large garage structure she had seen west of Cherry Bottom in the Founders Ridge area, wondering if it might be an ADU. Blackford responded that he was not aware of it specifically, explaining he typically would not see it unless it required a variance. He added that the zoning code allowed for garages up to around 1,000 square feet, the same size as an ADU, so it could be a large garage that was fully compliant. President Bowers clarified she had been curious because it appeared to be a significant, possibly two-story structure with living space above. Blackford said he would take a closer look to confirm. President Bowers assured him she meant no criticism of any resident and was simply curious. Blackford agreed, saying it was a matter of research and understanding.

Vice President Weaver, noting no further discussion, thanked Director Blackford and his team for the presentation and their work.

3. Community Grants Update

2025-0133 2025 Community Grant Program - Evaluation Matrix

Senior Deputy Director Corey Wybensinger presented an update on the city's grant program. He noted that Council had received, ahead of time, a spreadsheet summarizing the applications, requested amounts, applicant descriptions, and the Grant Review Committee's recommendations. Wybensinger explained that the program was now in its third year and had been redesigned compared to 2023 and 2024. He reviewed the timeline for the current round. On March 27, 2025, staff issued a notice of funding opportunity to over two dozen nonprofits that had previously engaged with the city's process, letting them know the application would be released April 1, 2025. On April 1st, the online portal opened using OpenGov software, and staff accepted all applications through that system. They also advertised the program via the city website, social media, and the newsletter. On April 7, 2025, they sent reminders to all nonprofits for which they had email addresses to ensure awareness of the funding opportunity. The submission deadline was April 25, 2025, and the city received 16 applications.

Deputy Director Wybensinger noted that the Grant Review Committee had expanded from three members to five this year, with two members appointed by Council, two by the Mayor, and one city staff member, Economic Development Director Jeff Gottke. He praised the committee members for their diligence and thoughtful approach, ensuring their recommendations aligned with program priorities. He reminded Council of those priorities, which focused on basic human necessities like food and clothing, stability, mental health services, general health, safety, welfare, and the overall best interest of the community. Wybensinger described the committee's process. On May 2, 2025, staff released the applications to committee members so they could review them at home for five days. On May 7, 2025, the committee met in person. Wybensinger, though not a voting member, facilitated the meeting. The committee requested clarifying information and held follow-up interviews with two of the 16 applicants on May 16 and May 27, 2025. He reported that the committee recommended funding 13 of the 16 applications, totaling $81,250 from the $100,000 budget. The city had received a little over $119,000 in funding requests overall. Six applications received full funding, seven received partial funding, and three were recommended for no award. He explained that the committee determined funding amounts by evaluating eligibility, the alignment with program priorities, and the value of the proposed programs. Between June 10 and June 16, 2025, city staff held pre-award conferences with all 13 funded applicants. During these meetings, they reviewed expectations for the funding, signed grant agreements, discussed eligible and non-eligible costs, and explained the reporting benchmarks. Wybensinger said the city required progress updates on September 8, 2025, and October 20, 2025, and had expectations for final reports tailored to each project. He emphasized the city's shift to a reimbursement-based model, ensuring that smaller nonprofits understood the process so they wouldn't be burdened by floating expenses for too long. He explained that the program's expiration date was December 31, 2025, unless an extension was requested in advance, with the city aiming to close out all projects within the budget year for a clean slate in the next cycle.

Councilmember Renner thanked Wybensinger, noting that Council had expressed concerns about the process in the fall. He praised Wybensinger's stewardship of city funds and his adherence to the program's goals.

Councilmember Jones also expressed appreciation and asked for more context about why some organizations received no funding, given there was money left over. She also asked what would happen to the unallocated funds. Wybensinger explained that unspent funds would return to the General Fund. He said the committee did not feel obligated to spend the full $100,000 but aimed to fund valuable programs. For the three denied applications, reasons varied: some fell outside the scope of the applying entity, some failed to meet eligibility requirements (including benefiting 51% or more of Gahanna residents or the Gahanna-Jefferson Public School area), and one did not fit within the program's three stated priorities. Councilmember Jones asked if those organizations received feedback on why they didn't get funding or what they could do to improve. Wybensinger confirmed that all three received a notice of non-award that included an invitation to contact him for feedback or help with improving future applications.

President Bowers thanked Wybensinger for addressing past concerns while maintaining the program's integrity and intent.

Vice President Weaver echoed the appreciation, recognizing both Wybensinger's and the committee's efforts and seriousness in their work. He clarified that the spreadsheet Council received included summaries provided by applicants but that Council had not received the full applications. Wybensinger confirmed that was correct.

Councilmember Jones asked if Council could see the full applications. Weaver noted they were public record. Wybensinger agreed and offered to provide them on request, acknowledging the applications included a lot of paperwork. He explained he tried to provide a summary but would support any further review Council desired.

Vice President Weaver commended the transparency and communication the staff and committee had shown, especially in following up with applicants and issuing clear non-award letters with suggestions for improvement. Wybensinger reiterated the goal of making the program successful for all applicants. He emphasized his willingness to help organizations improve their applications and noted many small nonprofits were still learning the process. Weaver asked one final question about the reimbursement model, confirming that if an organization approved for $10,000 spent only $9,500, it would be reimbursed for the lower amount. Wybensinger confirmed that and gave an example of Gahanna Residents In Need (GRIN), which had been awarded up to $10,000 but spent about $7,966, meaning around $2,000 would return to the General Fund. He said he expected other projects might also come in under budget, causing the total disbursed amount to continue decreasing slightly. Weaver invited any other questions. Hearing none, he thanked Wybensinger for the presentation.

D. ADJOURNMENT:

With no further business before the Committee of the Whole, the Chair adjourned the meeting at 8:47 p.m.

Jeremy A. VanMeter
Clerk of Council

APPROVED by the Committee of the Whole, this
day of 2025.

Trenton I. Weaver