

## 2026 Charter Review Testimony

Thank you, Commissioners, for your time, diligence, and thoughtful service throughout the Charter Review process. Charter review is an important civic responsibility because even limited amendments may shape the City's governance structure and institutional operations for many years.

This testimony is respectfully submitted in support of continued public discussion and additional study regarding Gahanna's form of government and related governance structures, including administrative continuity and the structure of the City Attorney position.

While significant structural changes should not be undertaken lightly, periodic evaluation of governmental systems is a normal and constructive part of long-range municipal governance. The question is not whether current or prior officeholders have served in good faith, but whether the City's governing framework remains best positioned to support long-term administrative stability, accountability, continuity, and effective collaboration across future administrations and Councils.

Several considerations may warrant additional evaluation before the Charter Review process concludes:

- 1. Long-Term Administrative Continuity and Professional Management**

Council-manager forms of government are commonly discussed in municipal governance literature as a means of strengthening administrative continuity, professional management, and long-range operational planning across election cycles.[1] Regardless of whether such a transition is ultimately recommended, the topic appears sufficiently significant to merit continued objective evaluation and public education rather than indefinite postponement.

- 2. Public Participation and Voter Consideration**

Any substantial change in governmental structure would appropriately require robust public engagement, careful research, and voter consideration. Continued study by the Commission could help provide residents with neutral, fact-based information regarding the comparative strengths, tradeoffs, and operational implications of different municipal governance models.

- 3. Institutional Stability and Strategic Capacity**

One commonly cited consideration in professional local government management models is the ability to maintain administrative consistency despite political transitions.[2] This consideration may be particularly relevant when evaluating long-term

strategic planning, organizational continuity, recruitment and retention of professional staff, implementation of multi-year initiatives, and institutional resilience over time.

Public discussions surrounding prior fiscal measures and municipal tax policy debates in Gahanna illustrate the importance of maintaining strong public confidence, organizational clarity, and long-range governance stability during periods of significant policy decision-making.[3] These considerations may appropriately support continued examination of comparative governance structures even where reasonable individuals may differ regarding whether structural change is ultimately warranted.

#### **4. Structure of the City Attorney Position**

If Gahanna maintains its current form of government, consideration may also be warranted regarding whether the City Attorney structure best supports balanced institutional representation, continuity of legal counsel, and collaborative governance. Any proposal to place the position solely under mayoral appointment authority should be evaluated carefully in light of institutional checks and balances, continuity concerns, and the importance of maintaining public confidence in independent legal guidance provided to municipal government as a whole.

Alternative appointment structures utilized in some peer municipalities may warrant additional comparative review.[4]

#### **5. Continued Research Rather Than Immediate Dismissal**

The Commission has understandably recognized that a transition in governmental structure would require substantial additional research and public discussion. Respectfully, that need for further study may support continued exploration rather than ending consideration entirely. Even if no immediate recommendation is advanced during this Charter cycle, establishing a firm and formal pathway for review, comparative analysis, or public education would help ensure the issue receives the level of evaluation its significance warrants. Such a plan should have a finite timeline, so it does not languish in ambiguity.

Reasonable individuals may differ on whether Gahanna should retain its current structure or consider an alternative model. However, continued examination of governance best practices, administrative resilience, institutional accountability, and long-term organizational continuity can strengthen public confidence regardless of the outcome.

Thank you again for your public service and careful consideration of these matters.

## Sources / References

- [1] International City/County Management Association (ICMA), “Council-Manager Form of Government.” <https://icma.org>
- [2] National Civic League, municipal charter and governance resources. <https://www.nationalcivicleague.org>
- [3] See, e.g., WOSU Public Media coverage regarding Gahanna municipal income tax discussions and litigation-related public debate (2018–2019):

<https://www.wosu.org/news/2018-11-02/gahanna-residents-could-get-13-2-million-back-in-overpaid-taxes>

<https://www.wosu.org/news/2019-05-08/election-2019-voters-approve-bond-columbus-bond-package-gahanna-tax-increase>

- [4] Comparative municipal governance structures and attorney appointment models may be reviewed through publicly available Ohio municipal charters and administrative codes, including peer Central Ohio municipalities.