



City of Gahanna

200 S. Hamilton Road
Gahanna, Ohio 43230

Meeting Minutes

Charter Review

*Ethan Barnhardt, Chair
Carrin Wester, Vice Chair
Jamie Belisle
Edward A. Hill, Jr.
Richard Maxwell
Raymond J. Mularski
Karen Reynolds*

Jeremy A. VanMeter, Clerk of Council

Thursday, April 9, 2026

6:30 PM

Council Chambers, City Hall

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

Chair Barnhardt called to order the Regular Meeting of the Charter Review Commission at 6:30 p.m. on Thursday, April 9, 2026, and led members in the Pledge of Allegiance. The agenda for the meeting was published on Friday, April 3, 2026.

Present 6 - Ethan Barnhardt, Edward A. Hill Jr., Richard Maxwell, Raymond J. Mularski, Karen Reynolds, and Carrin Wester

Absent 1 - Jamie Belisle

B. ADDITIONS OR CORRECTIONS TO THE AGENDA.

None.

C. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES.

[2026-0068](#)

Charter Review Commission Minutes 2026-03-26

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

Yes: 6 - Barnhardt, Hill, Maxwell, Mularski, Reynolds and Wester

Absent: 1 - Belisle

D. PUBLIC COMMENT.

None.

E. NEW BUSINESS.

1. Presentation from Council Members, Board & Commission Members

Trenton Weaver, City Councilmember, Ward 4 & President of Council

President Weaver addressed Chair Barnhardt, Vice Chair Wester, members of the Commission, and the City Attorney. He introduced himself as the Ward 4 representative and Council President and expressed gratitude to the Commission for its service and time commitment. Weaver stated that his comments focused primarily on Article IV of the Charter. He expressed full support for the proposal to eliminate the Board of Zoning and Building Appeals (BZBA). He also supported proposed language changes regarding the mayoral primary requirement and encouraged those changes to move forward. Weaver acknowledged the presence of Council Vice President Jamille Jones, Councilmember Merisa Bowers, and Councilmember Kaylee Padova and stated that they would provide additional detail on certain topics. He expressed support for Councilmember Bowers' proposed revisions, including potential changes to Section 4.04 to establish a two-year term for the Council President and Vice President or, alternatively, to allow Council to determine the process through its rules. He suggested adjusting the proposed implementation date from 2028 to 2030 to allow a full election cycle for current incumbents.

President Weaver referenced Sections 4.10, 4.11, 4.12, and 4.13 regarding meeting procedures and legislative processes. He also addressed the standardization of qualifications for elected offices, noting Vice Chair Wester's recommendation to standardize residency requirements. He expressed support for streamlining qualifications for the offices of Mayor, City Attorney, and Council and deferred to the Commission on determining the appropriate residency length. Weaver discussed the City's strategic plan and expressed appreciation for those involved in its creation. He noted that Council had adopted the plan by ordinance but raised concerns about including a requirement for a strategic plan in the Charter, stating that such a mandate could create a financial burden for the City. He stated that the City could review or update the plan as needed through the legislative process and maintained his concern regarding mandated expenses.

President Weaver proposed a revision to Section 4.02 regarding the composition and terms of Council members, recommending that ward boundaries be based on the number of residents rather than registered voters. He explained that Council represents all residents,

including children and lawful non-citizens, and stated that this approach aligns with federal practice and case law. He also noted that the Gahanna Code references both population and voter registration statistics but stated that the Charter would take precedence over the Code. Weaver continued his remarks by reiterating that his proposed change would better reflect the actual demographics of the community and align with federal practice.

President Weaver then returned to the topic of standardizing qualifications for public office, specifically addressing public office conflict language within Sections 3.02, 4.03, and 10.02 of the Charter, which govern the Mayor, City Council, and City Attorney. Weaver explained that certain sections identified specific permissible roles, such as notary public or membership in the state militia, and noted inconsistencies among the sections. He recommended standardizing the language across all sections and identified the language in Section 4.03, governing Council qualifications, as the most appropriate model. He also encouraged streamlining the language to reduce redundancy and prevent future conflicts. Weaver noted that many attorneys serve as notaries public and that elected officials often hold additional appointed positions on boards and commissions. He referenced guidance published by the Ohio Attorney General, which outlines compatible and prohibited public offices, and stated that this existing guidance made certain Charter language unnecessary. He recommended removing redundant language and proposed that Council members should hold no other elected public office or compensated municipal employment. He added that the Commission could apply similar revisions to other branches of government if desired. Weaver concluded his remarks and offered to answer questions. Chair Barnhardt thanked him and opened the floor to Commission members.

Vice Chair Wester initiated discussion and thanked Weaver for his comments. She asked for clarification regarding the standardization of qualifications, specifically in relation to the City Attorney section. She referenced her prior email and inquired whether holding an active law license in Ohio automatically conferred notary status. Weaver responded that an attorney must take an additional step to obtain notary status, including filing with the Secretary of State and paying a fee, but confirmed that licensed attorneys may do so. Vice Chair Wester acknowledged the explanation and stated that she did not

view that provision as problematic. She then raised concern about language referencing political parties and political party conventions, which she considered an outlier, and asked whether Weaver saw any benefit to retaining that language. Weaver responded that he did not believe the language provided additional benefit. He explained that members of political party central or executive committees hold public offices and are elected during primary elections, but stated that he saw no conflict and that the Ohio Attorney General's guidance would address any such issues. He indicated agreement with Vice Chair Wester's concern and supported removing the language to streamline the section. Vice Chair Wester clarified her understanding of the proposed language and noted that, under the current Charter language, a City Attorney could hold a leadership position within a county political party. Weaver confirmed that interpretation.

Chair Barnhardt asked whether Weaver intended to apply the same standardized language across all three Charter sections, using the Council provision as the model that prohibits holding any other elected public office or compensated municipal employment. Weaver confirmed that intent and stated that he found it unnecessary to list specific permissible roles, such as membership in the state militia, within individual sections.

Commissioner Mularski asked whether the full-time nature of the Mayor's position justified stricter limitations compared to the part-time roles of Council members and the City Attorney. Weaver responded that the Commission could determine whether to retain additional restrictions for full-time positions. He acknowledged the distinction between full-time and part-time roles but reiterated his view that the Charter language could be simplified overall.

Chair Barnhardt suggested reviewing other municipal charters with full-time mayoral systems to evaluate how they structure similar provisions. He stated that such comparisons could help inform the Commission's approach.

Commissioner Hill thanked Weaver for his presentation and asked whether he had recommendations regarding residency requirements for elected officials, particularly in relation to his earlier comments about residents versus registered voters. Weaver stated that he deferred to the Commission on residency requirements. He noted that

the residency requirement for Council had previously changed from 12 months to 15 months and expressed the view that voters ultimately determine candidate viability.

City Attorney Priya Tamilarasan asked for clarification regarding Weaver's proposal to standardize qualifications and remove language referencing conflicts of office. She asked whether he intentionally omitted language addressing conflicts, given that the Charter could impose stricter requirements than state law. Weaver confirmed that he intentionally removed the language because he considered it redundant in light of existing state guidance. He stated that state law already defines compatible and incompatible offices and that additional Charter language was unnecessary. City Attorney Tamilarasan responded that removing the conflict language could result in a more restrictive interpretation, potentially prohibiting officeholders from holding positions that state law would otherwise allow, such as serving as a notary public. She explained that, if the Charter removed both the proposed and existing language, state guidance would control and permit individuals to hold offices that do not conflict under state law. Weaver clarified his earlier proposal regarding the removal of conflict-of-office language. He explained that he eliminated the entire clause referencing compensated public office or employment that could conflict with the role of a Council member and revised the sentence to focus solely on employment with the municipality. He stated that, under his proposal, state law would govern conflicts of office, while the Charter would only prohibit holding another elected office or compensated municipal employment. Weaver provided an example from his own employment with the Franklin County Auditor's office and explained that he must avoid roles that could create a conflict with his duties as a Council member. He stated that removing the clause would leave state law as the controlling authority on such conflicts.

Vice Chair Wester then asked additional questions regarding Weaver's proposed change to ward composition. She confirmed that the current Charter language bases ward boundaries on the number of registered voters and asked how that data is updated and communicated to Council. Weaver responded that the City reviewed census data following the 2020 census and determined that no statistically significant changes required action at that time. He stated that his proposed change to "residents" would better reflect the full

population, including individuals who cannot vote, and would make the language more inclusive. Wester asked how the current system negatively affects the community. Weaver responded that basing representation on registered voters excludes certain residents, such as children and lawful non-citizens, and that his proposal would correct that issue. Wester then asked whether Weaver could provide current ward data, and Weaver stated that he could follow up with that information. She raised concerns about how a shift from registered voters to residents might affect petition requirements and ballot initiatives, which rely on voter-based thresholds. Weaver acknowledged the challenge and noted that similar issues exist at the federal level, where representation is based on total population rather than registered voters. He stated that, despite these challenges, he believed the change to residents was appropriate and consistent with broader practices. Weaver also acknowledged awareness of a nearby community facing petition-related challenges and noted that petition requirements rely on qualified electors. He maintained that using residents for ward composition would remain appropriate, even if it did not significantly alter ward boundaries. Wester asked whether Weaver was aware of other similar communities that use residents rather than registered voters as the benchmark. Weaver stated that he had not researched other communities on that specific provision. Wester then asked whether using residents instead of registered voters could create disparities in campaign conditions across wards due to differences in voter distribution. Weaver responded that, based on his experience campaigning in all four wards, he did not believe that changing the standard from registered voters to residents would create a statistically significant difference. Vice Chair Wester asked whether Weaver had any proposals for how ward boundaries would be redrawn under his suggested change. Weaver replied that Council would follow the same process it currently uses, noting that he did not serve on Council during the last redistricting. Wester then shifted discussion to Section 4.04 regarding the election of Council leadership. She referenced Councilmember Bowers' memorandum and stated that the current Charter language requires Council to elect a President and Vice President annually. She inquired as to whether changing the term to two years would make the Charter more restrictive and reduce flexibility. Weaver agreed that a two-year term would reduce flexibility but stated that it would align with the two-year election cycle for Council members. He acknowledged that maintaining the current structure remained an option. Wester

suggested that Council could maintain annual elections while adopting an internal practice favoring two-year leadership terms. Weaver responded that such an approach could create conflict between Council rules and the Charter language and stated that it could create confusion. The existing Charter language was read, which requires Council to elect a President and Vice President at the first regular meeting each January for one-year terms. Wester confirmed that the Charter does not prohibit individuals from serving consecutive terms. Weaver agreed with that interpretation.

Chair Barnhardt asked Weaver to explain the advantages of establishing two-year leadership terms. Weaver stated that longer terms would provide consistency and serve as a managerial benefit, particularly because the Council President supervises Council staff. He explained that continuity in leadership supports effective staff supervision and organizational stability. Weaver noted that the Council President oversees multiple full-time staff members and occasionally interns, and that leadership continuity helps address ongoing administrative and personnel matters. He emphasized that consistent leadership improves oversight and decision-making within Council operations. Chair Barnhardt asked whether the current one-year term had created any specific challenges. Weaver responded that transitions between leadership terms can create a learning curve. He noted that previous Council Presidents had served multiple consecutive terms and stated that continuity had occurred in practice, though not guaranteed by the Charter. He added that he did not know whether he would continue serving as President in the next organizational meeting. Chair Barnhardt then asked whether Council had historically maintained continuity in leadership through consecutive one-year terms. Weaver responded that, based on his four years of service, Council had followed that practice during that time. Chair Barnhardt asked for any additional questions. Hearing none, the Commission thanked Weaver for his presentation.

Jamile Jones, City Councilmember At-Large & Vice President of Council

Vice President Jones addressed the Commission and stated that she would submit written recommendations following the meeting. She explained that she spoke both as a Councilmember and as a community member invested in the City's future. She emphasized that the Charter should reflect both the present and the City's future

direction. Jones stated that she did not intend to propose specific legal language and would defer that responsibility to the Commission and the City Attorney. She explained that her purpose was to address the rationale behind proposed changes rather than the specific wording. Jones first addressed Section 4.10 regarding regular meetings, specifically the limitation on meeting locations. She expressed support for recommendations previously shared with the Commission and affirmed that her comments aligned with those proposals while adding a community perspective. Jones advocated for allowing Council to meet outside of Council chambers with proper public notice. She stated that the current Charter restricts meetings to chambers and prevents Council and administration from meeting in alternative settings. Jones explained that effective governance requires collaboration between Council and administration and compared it to team development in organizational settings. She stated that teams require opportunities for alignment and that such efforts often work best in neutral environments outside of formal workspaces. Jones stated that the current Charter prevents Council from holding retreats, team-building sessions, or other collaborative meetings outside of chambers. She argued that allowing such flexibility would support better alignment and signal that intentional team development is a valued function of government. Jones also stated that expanding permissible meeting locations would improve community engagement by allowing Council to hold meetings or town halls in different parts of the community. She explained that current restrictions prevent more than three Council members from participating in such events outside of chambers, even with proper notice. Jones encouraged the Commission to consider the change as a way to improve accessibility, equity, and engagement within the community.

Vice President Jones then addressed Section 2.01 regarding the frequency of Charter Review. She acknowledged concerns that the current five-year review cycle may be too frequent compared to other municipalities but encouraged the Commission to also consider the benefits of maintaining that timeline. Jones stated that significant changes can occur within a five-year period and referenced recent events as an example of how circumstances can shift rapidly. She encouraged the Commission to consider that the five-year interval allows the City to remain responsive to change. Jones continued her remarks on the Charter Review cycle and encouraged the Commission to maintain flexibility in the timing of future reviews. She

acknowledged that the current Charter allows Council or residents to initiate a review but suggested that the Commission consider language that would not require reviews less frequently than a specified period, while still allowing adaptability. She emphasized that significant changes can occur within a relatively short time and that regular review of governing documents helps identify issues that may otherwise be overlooked, particularly those related to inclusion and equity.

Vice President Jones expressed support for proposed changes to residency requirements for elected officials and emphasized the importance of consistency. She stated that consistent standards help avoid both the perception and reality of unequal requirements and reduce speculation regarding eligibility for office.

Vice President Jones then addressed Section 23.07 regarding the non-discrimination clause. She described the provision as a foundational statement of the City's commitment to serving and protecting all individuals and affirmed the importance of its broad application. Jones recommended aligning the Charter's non-discrimination language with the City's internal human resources equal employment opportunity statement. She noted that differences exist between the Charter and internal policies and stated that, as the governing document, the Charter should reflect the same comprehensive standards. Jones identified specific gaps, including the absence of explicit language regarding gender identity or expression in the Charter, which appears in the City's internal policies. She also noted that the Charter references "covered veteran" status, while internal policies refer more broadly to past or present military service. Additionally, she stated that internal policies include broader language related to religion, belief, and ethnic or social origin, whereas the Charter contains more limited terminology. Jones emphasized that precise language carries significant legal and practical implications. She explained that distinctions such as those between gender and gender identity have been recognized in federal court decisions and can affect how cases are interpreted. She stated that including explicit language in the Charter would provide a stable local foundation rather than relying on evolving federal interpretations. Jones concluded that the City has already established comprehensive non-discrimination standards in its internal practices and stated that the Charter should reflect the same commitment. She emphasized that the standards

applied to City employment should also apply to residents and others who interact with the City. Jones concluded her remarks by thanking the Commission for its time and commitment and offered to answer any questions.

The Chair thanked Vice President Jones for her presentation and opened the floor for questions.

Commissioner Reynolds asked several questions regarding the proposal to allow meetings outside of Council chambers, specifically in relation to public access and transparency. She asked whether meetings are currently livestreamed and how meetings held in alternative locations would be documented or made accessible to the public. Vice President Jones confirmed that meetings are livestreamed and stated that technology would allow meetings to be viewed from other locations. She explained that individuals could access or project meetings from other venues and noted that her recommendation focused on enabling Council to hold meetings within the community, such as in neighborhoods or public spaces, rather than being limited to Council chambers. Reynolds asked whether additional Charter language should require written summaries or reporting for meetings held outside chambers. Jones responded that existing procedures, including meeting minutes, already provide documentation and that the same rules would apply regardless of location. She stated that her recommendation would not change documentation requirements but would only expand where meetings could occur.

Vice Chair Wester asked for clarification regarding the current Charter language in Section 4.10 and whether it restricts meeting locations. Councilmember Bowers stated that, under the current language, Council may only move a meeting outside chambers if attendance is expected to exceed capacity. The Commission requested clarification from City Attorney Tamilarasan. After reviewing the section, the City Attorney confirmed that the Charter requires all regular and special meetings to be held in Council chambers unless Council determines that attendance will exceed the space's capacity. City Attorney Tamilarasan asked for clarification regarding whether the request involved additional restrictions on meeting locations beyond those stated in the Charter. Wester responded by seeking confirmation that Jones desired flexibility for Council to meet in alternative locations at its discretion. Jones confirmed that she sought the ability for Council

to determine meeting locations by vote. Wester questioned whether the current Charter language already permitted such flexibility. City Attorney Tamilarasan explained that the Charter contains prescriptive language requiring meetings to occur in Council chambers unless Council determines that anticipated attendance would exceed capacity. She stated that this requirement limits flexibility because it ties any change in location to attendance rather than purpose. City Attorney Tamilarasan further explained that, while Council could theoretically justify a location change based on anticipated attendance, doing so for other purposes, such as community engagement, would not align with the intent of the current language. She characterized the provision as restrictive and confirmed that Jones' proposal would allow meetings in alternative locations for reasons beyond attendance. Wester asked whether Jones planned to submit proposed language to address the issue. Jones stated that she would work with the Commission and the City Attorney to develop appropriate language. Wester asked whether other communities regularly hold meetings in alternative locations. Jones responded that she did not know of communities that meet regularly outside their primary location but emphasized that other municipalities maintain the flexibility to do so. She provided examples of off-site retreats and team-building sessions involving Council and administration, noting that such activities often occur outside municipal facilities. Chair Barnhardt shared prior professional experience observing similar off-site meetings and retreats, which included public notice and meeting minutes while providing a different environment for planning and collaboration.

Commissioner Reynolds requested that Jones include the City's equal employment opportunity statement when submitting her written materials, particularly to support her comments regarding Section 23.07. Jones agreed and added that the statement was also available publicly on the City's website.

Vice Chair Wester indicated that she had a follow-up question related to the non-discrimination section and expressed general support for making the Charter language more inclusive, noting that she viewed the proposed direction as positive. Vice Chair Wester asked Jones to clarify whether her recommendation would require the Charter's non-discrimination language to mirror the City's equal employment opportunity statement and specifically include classifications such as

gender identity or expression. Jones confirmed that approach and stated that, if prioritizing changes, she considered the inclusion of gender identity and expression to be the most important addition. Jones explained that legal distinctions exist between gender, gender identity, and gender expression at the federal level and emphasized the importance of explicitly including that language in the Charter. She stated that clear language would prevent misinterpretation and ensure that individuals could not rely on narrower wording to justify discriminatory actions.

Commissioner Hill thanked Jones for her presentation and asked that, when she submits her written materials, she highlights specific categories for the Commission to consider. Jones agreed to do so. City Attorney Tamilarasan added that protected classes, including gender identity or expression, familial status, and military status, already appear in other sections of the City's code, including housing and criminal provisions. She noted that these classifications are consistent across multiple areas of the City's regulations.

Chair Barnhardt asked for any additional questions. Hearing none, the Commission thanked Jones for her presentation.

Merisa Bowers, City Councilmember At-Large

Councilmember Bowers expressed appreciation for the opportunity to present. She stated that her recommendations focused primarily on Section 4 of the Charter and characterized them as largely technical or "cleanup" items. Bowers clarified that her comments reflected her individual views and not necessarily those of the full Council, though she noted that some Council members had expressed agreement with recommendations included in her prior memorandum. She also referenced recent updates to Council rules that reflect Council perspectives. Bowers stated that she offered her recommendations as suggestions for the Commission's consideration and not as directives. She explained that her approach focused on reducing overly prescriptive Charter provisions, improving adaptability to new technology, and aligning Charter language with current legal requirements, including open meetings and sunshine laws. Bowers continued by outlining guiding principles for the proposed Charter revisions, including increasing flexibility while maintaining compliance with open meetings and sunshine laws, improving clarity and

consistency between the Charter and Council rules, and supporting continuity in Council operations.

Addressing Section 4.02 regarding composition and terms, Councilmember Bowers noted that Council terms begin on January 2 and end on January 1. She explained that if the organizational meeting were scheduled after January 2, newly elected members would not be sworn in and therefore could not take official action until that meeting occurred. She stated that, in rare urgent situations, Council would need to call a special meeting to administer oaths and conduct business. Bowers then addressed the discussion regarding changing “registered voters” to “residents” for ward composition. She stated that such a change would create more balanced and equitable representation by including all residents, rather than only registered voters. She noted that census data, which reflects total population, can support this approach.

Regarding Section 4.03 on qualifications, Bowers expressed support for standardizing residency requirements across elected offices and indicated agreement with a two-year residency requirement. She stated that meaningful community understanding and connections require sufficient time living in the community. She deferred to the City Attorney on matters related to employment and conflict-of-interest language.

Turning to Section 4.04, Bowers encouraged consideration of either increased flexibility or adoption of a two-year term for Council President and Vice President. She stated that longer terms would reduce the learning curve associated with leadership roles, minimize decision fatigue from annual elections, and provide continuity. She also noted that several peer communities, including Upper Arlington, Columbus, and Westerville, utilize leadership terms longer than one year, while Reynoldsburg employs a different structure with a four-year elected council president.

Addressing Section 4.10 on regular meetings, Bowers recommended modifying the organizational meeting date from January 2 to a date on or before January 7 to allow greater scheduling flexibility and avoid weekend meetings. She stated that Council had already amended its rules to anticipate this potential Charter change. Bowers also supported adding flexibility for meeting locations while maintaining

transparency. She proposed language that would allow Council to designate an alternate meeting location by motion at a prior meeting, with proper public notice and compliance with open meetings laws, while maintaining Council chambers as the default location. Bowers then paused to invite questions.

Commissioner Mularski asked for clarification, noting that if the organizational meeting occurred on or before January 7, Council members would not be sworn in between January 2 and that meeting date. He expressed concern that delaying the organizational meeting beyond January 2 could result in a lack of quorum because newly elected members would not yet be sworn in. Bowers explained that recent amendments to Council rules provide that the regular meeting immediately follows the organizational meeting, ensuring that quorum is established once members are sworn in at that initial meeting of the year. City Attorney Tamilarasan explained that the oath of office does not require a formal public meeting and may be administered privately by an authorized individual. She acknowledged that the current practice of swearing in all Council members at the organizational meeting is a ceremonial practice, though it is not a requirement.

Commissioner Maxwell asked whether the start of Council terms and the organizational meeting could be better aligned. City Attorney Tamilarasan responded that elected officials may be sworn in after the official start of their term and still validly assume office upon taking the oath. Bowers reiterated the importance of preserving the shared swearing-in ceremony at the organizational meeting and stated that the proposed changes would maintain that practice without disrupting the official start of terms.

Vice Chair Wester returned to the discussion of Section 4.04 regarding Council leadership terms. She confirmed that the current Charter does not prohibit consecutive one-year terms for President and Vice President. Bowers agreed and acknowledged that moving to a two-year term would reduce flexibility. She explained that flexibility was not the sole consideration and noted that, prior to 2022, Council often rotated leadership annually rather than maintaining continuity. She stated that such rotation did not serve the best interests of the City. Drawing on her experience in both Vice President and President roles, Bowers explained that leadership positions involve ongoing responsibilities, including employee evaluations, goal setting, and

administrative oversight, which extend beyond a one-year cycle. She stated that a two-year term would better support continuity and effectiveness in these responsibilities. Bowers acknowledged that Council has recently maintained leadership continuity through consecutive one-year terms but stated that this practice does not align with the structure of some peer communities, which formally establish longer leadership terms. She acknowledged that annual leadership elections may create decision fatigue and suggested, as an alternative, that the Charter could defer to Council rules to determine leadership terms. She explained that Council could establish or modify such terms by ordinance, allowing flexibility without embedding a fixed term length in the Charter. Vice Chair Wester referenced Bowers' initial election to Council and recalled a prior organizational meeting in which she did not support the nominated Council President. Wester used this example to emphasize the value of allowing Council members to evaluate and vote on leadership annually. She stated that the current structure provides full flexibility without preventing consecutive terms and expressed the view that maintaining that flexibility presents no drawback. Vice Chair Wester further noted that annual voting allows Council members to publicly express their reasoning, whether in support of or opposition to leadership candidates, and stated that this transparency provides value. Vice Chair Wester then asked a follow-up question regarding the proposed change to the organizational meeting date in Section 4.10. She referenced the suggested language allowing the meeting to occur on or before January 7 and asked about the benefit of extending the timeline. Bowers explained that the intent was to allow the meeting to occur within the first week of January and that the January 7 date provided clarity in the language. Vice Chair Wester noted that the City's fiscal year begins on January 1 and asked whether delaying the organizational meeting could create any issues related to budget alignment. Bowers responded that the budget is adopted in December and takes effect on January 1, and that quarterly reporting does not occur until later in the year. She stated that the timing of the organizational meeting would not create conflicts with the budget process. Wester shared a prior experience of holding an organizational meeting on January 2, noting that while it may be inconvenient, it occurs only once per year and does not present a significant burden.

The Chair asked for any additional questions. Hearing none, the

Commission moved on to the next item.

Councilmember Bowers continued with recommendations related to Section 4.11 concerning special meetings. She requested that the Commission consider granting the City Attorney authority to convene special meetings, stating that this change would align with other provisions in the section and promote balance among the three branches of government. She explained that this authority would allow the City Attorney to brief Council on litigation or pending legal matters in executive session when necessary. Bowers also recommended simplifying language in the second paragraph of Section 4.11, noting that the current provision contains detailed notice requirements for Council members that may no longer be necessary given modern communication methods. She stated that she had not experienced issues with meeting notifications and emphasized that her recommendation would not alter public notice requirements, which would remain consistent with open meetings laws.

Turning to Section 4.12 on legislative procedure, Councilmember Bowers described her recommendation as minor and suggested removing outdated language from the first sentence, specifically a clause she believed no longer aligns with modern usage or Robert's Rules of Order.

Regarding Section 4.13 on public notice, Councilmember Bowers stated that she did not have specific redline language but provided examples of current practices used by the Clerk's office, including both physical postings and electronic notifications. She acknowledged that physical postings may appear outdated but recommended retaining them as an accessible, analog option for members of the public. She encouraged a flexible, multimodal approach to public notice and suggested consulting Council office staff for expertise in public records and communication practices.

Finally, Councilmember Bowers addressed the proposed Charter requirement related to a strategic plan. She expressed opposition to including such a requirement, noting that it is uncommon among municipalities. She stated that research identified only a limited number of Ohio communities with similar provisions and indicated that at least one of those communities has not effectively implemented the requirement. She also noted that a review of surrounding

municipalities in Franklin County showed that most do not include strategic plan requirements in their charters. Bowers reiterated support for the City's strategic plan, noting her involvement on the steering committee and expressing confidence in its value to the community. She clarified that her opposition to including a strategic plan requirement in the Charter did not reflect criticism of the plan itself, but rather concern about its appropriateness as a Charter mandate. Bowers cautioned that including such a requirement could impose financial obligations that might compete with other funding priorities. She encouraged the Commission to consider how other City plans, such as the Capital Improvement Plan and Land Use Plan, are implemented through ordinance and administrative processes rather than Charter requirements. She noted that these plans include procedures for updates and allow flexibility based on budget considerations. Bowers concluded her prepared remarks and offered to answer questions.

Commissioner Reynolds asked whether granting the City Attorney authority to call special meetings, as discussed under Section 4.11, aligns with practices in other communities. Councilmember Bowers stated that she had not researched other municipalities on that specific issue and described the recommendation as a straightforward proposal.

Chair Barnhardt asked whether the City Attorney's current inability to call a special meeting had caused any issues. Bowers responded that she was not aware of any such instances. Chair Barnhardt then returned to discussion of the proposed Charter requirement for a strategic plan. He asked for clarification regarding the example of Avon Lake and whether its Charter requires strategic planning. Bowers explained that Avon Lake's Charter requires annual strategic planning efforts by Council but indicated that the requirement has not been consistently implemented and that disagreements between administration and Council had occurred. Chair Barnhardt raised questions about the asserted fiscal impact of including a strategic plan requirement in the Charter. He stated that such a requirement does not necessarily mandate an expensive planning process and could instead provide a structured opportunity for regular communication, evaluation, and updates between administration and Council. He further noted that strategic plans in some municipalities are developed at significant cost but may not be actively used, suggesting that

incorporating regular review requirements could help ensure continued engagement with the plan rather than allowing it to become inactive. In response to questions regarding the proposed strategic plan requirement, Bowers stated that she could not determine whether the proposal would result in a fiscal impact. She emphasized that existing processes, such as the Capital Improvement Plan adopted by ordinance, already provide flexibility for updates and refinement. She cautioned that embedding a strategic plan requirement in the Charter could limit the City's ability to make timely adjustments compared to adopting such measures by ordinance. She expressed support for integrating the strategic plan into ongoing Council activities, including annual reporting and consideration of ordinances, to ensure continued relevance and alignment with City initiatives. However, she reiterated concern about incorporating a comprehensive strategic planning requirement into the Charter within a limited timeframe and emphasized reliance on her research and experience in forming that position.

The Chair asked for any additional questions. Hearing none, the Commission thanked Councilmember Bowers for her comments and discussion.

Kaylee Padova, City Councilmember, Ward 3

Councilmember Padova addressed the Commission, thanked members for their service, and acknowledged the time commitment required for the Charter Review process. She introduced herself as the Ward 3 representative on City Council and stated that she appeared before the Commission to request a comprehensive evaluation of the City's form of government, including consideration of whether a city manager model or the current strong mayor system would best serve Gahanna in the future. Councilmember Padova stated that she raised the question of evaluating the City's form of government for several reasons. She explained that, in her role on Council, residents frequently asked why Gahanna does not operate under a city manager form of government, often in comparison to nearby suburbs that use that structure. Padova noted that the City had recently completed a comprehensive strategic plan and stated that, as implementation begins, the Commission should consider whether the current governmental structure best supports those long-term goals. She also emphasized that the Charter is only reviewed every five

years, making the current process the appropriate opportunity to examine foundational questions about governance. Padova observed that several comparable communities, including New Albany, Westerville, Dublin, Worthington, and Upper Arlington, operate under a city manager form of government. She clarified that this comparison does not mean such a structure is necessarily appropriate for Gahanna but stated that it warrants thoughtful consideration. Padova emphasized that she did not present a specific proposal or advocate for a predetermined outcome. Instead, she requested that the Commission fully evaluate the issue, consider the advantages and disadvantages of each form of government, and determine which structure would best serve the City moving forward.

The Chair invited questions from the Commission.

Commissioner Hill asked whether Padova could provide information outlining the benefits and drawbacks of each form of government to support the Commission's discussion. Padova agreed to provide additional materials summarizing the advantages and disadvantages of each model. She suggested that the Commission review the City of Hilliard as a recent example of a community that transitioned to a city manager form of government, noting that its experience could offer relevant insights. She also noted that other communities, such as Westerville, have used the city manager model for a longer period and may provide less comparable examples due to their longstanding structure. Hill stated that he looked forward to reviewing additional materials and asked a follow-up question regarding whether there were any deficiencies in the City's current form of government that would justify considering a change. He noted that changes are often pursued to address existing shortcomings and asked whether such concerns motivated the request, or whether the suggestion was based primarily on timing during the Charter review process. Padova responded that she did not believe the current system is broken. She stated that the City has strong momentum and credited the current administration for its progress. She noted that Gahanna has recently secured more funding than some comparable cities that operate under a city manager model. Padova explained that her interest in evaluating the form of government focuses on future considerations rather than current deficiencies. She stated that mayoral leadership can change every four years and that a city manager structure could provide greater consistency and stability over time. Padova reiterated that she

did not raise the issue due to any present concerns but instead to encourage the Commission to evaluate it as part of a comprehensive Charter Review. She noted that prior discussion had suggested the Commission should not consider the issue and stated that she wanted to present the alternative perspective that it should be examined.

Commissioner Maxwell then expressed uncertainty about whether evaluating the form of government falls within the Commission's role and stated that he did not feel sufficiently informed to make such a determination. Padova responded that a change in the form of government would require a Charter amendment and stated that the Charter Review process provides the appropriate opportunity to consider such a change. City Attorney Tamilarasan confirmed that evaluation of the City's form of government falls within the scope of the Charter Review Commission's authority, stating that the Commission may consider the entire Charter or any of its provisions, including the structure of government itself.

Commissioner Mularski noted that a similar issue had been explored in 2015 through a separate review process and expressed concern about the time required to fully evaluate such a significant change. He stated that transitioning to a different form of government would involve substantial revisions to the Charter and questioned whether the Commission had sufficient time to conduct a thorough evaluation. Councilmember Padova reiterated that she was not advocating for a specific change but instead encouraging discussion. She stated that, if the Commission determined no change was warranted, that outcome would be appropriate, but if the discussion revealed potential benefits, the issue should be considered further. Mularski questioned the necessity of raising the issue during the current review, suggesting that it could be addressed through a separate process. Padova responded that the Charter Review process provides an opportunity to consider all aspects of the Charter and that such discussions remain appropriate within that context. City Attorney Tamilarasan cautioned against discouraging presenters from raising ideas and emphasized that the Commission has a responsibility to evaluate the entire Charter. City Attorney Tamilarasan stated that all suggestions, including those related to the form of government, are appropriate for discussion and that participants are entitled to share their perspectives.

Chair Barnhardt expressed agreement that the topic falls within the Commission's purview but noted concern about the limited timeframe and the number of proposals already under consideration. He asked Councilmember Padova for suggestions on how the Commission could realistically approach such a complex issue within existing time constraints. Padova responded that she did not expect the Commission to engage in a detailed discussion during that meeting. She recommended placing the topic on a future agenda as a discussion item to determine whether a majority of the Commission believes it warrants further consideration. Padova also referenced the possibility of forming subcommittees, as previously discussed by the Commission, and suggested that a smaller group could explore the issue in greater depth if the Commission chose to pursue it. She stated that, if a majority of the Commission preferred to retain the current strong mayor system, that decision would be appropriate. Padova reiterated that she did not advocate for a specific outcome but emphasized the importance of reviewing the entire Charter. She stated that, in her role representing a portion of the community, she raised the issue in response to recurring questions from residents over her time on Council and viewed the Charter Review process as the appropriate forum for such discussions.

Commissioner Hill expressed appreciation for Padova's presentation and emphasized the importance of listening to perspectives brought forward on behalf of constituents who were not present. He stated that the purpose of the discussion was not to reach a decision during the meeting but to consider and engage in dialogue on the issue. Hill also reminded the Commission that a prior presentation from an expert at The Ohio State University provided similar information for consideration and could serve as a resource for future discussions.

Vice Chair Wester thanked Councilmember Padova and sought clarification, confirming that Padova did not believe there were any current deficiencies in the City's form of government. Padova affirmed that position. Vice Chair Wester then referenced a prior presentation from a representative of The Ohio State University John Glenn College of Public Affairs and asked whether Padova had reviewed those comments. Padova confirmed that she had. Wester stated that one of the key points from that presentation was that, at the national level, charter review processes have trended toward focusing on best practices rather than fundamentally changing forms of government.

She noted that, while form of government can be considered, it is not typically the primary focus of such reviews. Wester asked whether there were any specific Charter changes related to best practices that Padova would recommend. Padova responded that she could not identify any specific examples at that time but offered to follow up if she developed additional ideas. Vice Chair Wester then referenced earlier discussions in which the Commission expressed a desire for recommendations to be data-driven, particularly for significant structural changes. She also recalled comments from a prior expert presentation indicating that changes to a form of government can require substantial effort and resources. Vice Chair Wester described the demands of public service and noted the extensive responsibilities of municipal administration. She emphasized that any consideration of a change in the form of government should be based on objective data. She stated that she had not heard specific data supporting such a change during the current discussion but remained open to reviewing such information if it were provided. Wester further referenced prior remarks from Councilmember Schnetzer, noting that there is no clear evidence that one form of government is inherently superior to another, including in areas such as financial performance or bond ratings. She stated that, based on the information currently available, the Commission did not have sufficient data to evaluate a potential change. Padova agreed with that characterization, stating that available information suggests neither form of government demonstrates a definitive advantage over the other. Wester concluded that, while the Commission has the authority to consider the issue, any evaluation should be grounded in objective analysis and supported by relevant data. She reiterated that she had not heard sufficient data to support a comprehensive evaluation of a change in the form of government at that time. She expressed appreciation for Padova's participation and stated that the Commission remained open to reviewing relevant data if it became available. She emphasized that data would be critical as the Commission moves forward with evaluating proposals using its prioritization framework.

Chair Barnhardt revisited concerns about time constraints and suggested that, while the Commission could discuss the issue, it might not need to advance a recommendation to the ballot. The member proposed that the Commission could instead document its discussion and potentially indicate that further study may be warranted, similar to a prior process undertaken in 2015. City Attorney Tamarasan clarified

that the Commission's formal role is to make recommendations for items to be placed on the ballot. However, she stated that the Commission could create a record of its discussion and reasoning for not advancing a proposal. She explained that such documentation could inform Council or other bodies and serve as a basis for future consideration, even if it does not constitute a formal recommendation. Chair Barnhardt confirmed that the Commission could note, on the record, that it was not prepared to recommend a change but believed the issue could warrant further exploration. City Attorney Tamarasan agreed that such discussion and rationale could be documented in the minutes.

Vice Chair Wester then asked Councilmember Padova to elaborate on her statement that residents had raised questions about the form of government. Wester asked whether Padova could quantify how frequently the issue had been raised and whether other Council members had reported similar feedback from constituents. Councilmember Padova responded that she could not quantify how frequently residents raised the issue but stated that the topic arises in conversations on a recurring basis. She explained that it is not discussed daily or weekly but comes up periodically, particularly when residents compare Gahanna to neighboring suburbs with different forms of government. Padova added that these conversations often occur during community events or professional gatherings, including regional meetings, where individuals familiar with other municipalities raise the topic. She stated that she could not speak to why other Councilmembers had not raised the issue, noting that they may not have had similar discussions or may have chosen not to bring it forward. Vice Chair Wester commented on prior information presented to the Commission regarding the prevalence of different forms of government within Franklin County. She noted that, while some nearby communities operate under a city manager model, the overall distribution among municipalities is more balanced, with both city manager and strong mayor systems in use. She stated that this information challenged the perception that one model predominates locally. Padova acknowledged that the communities most frequently used as comparison points in her conversations tend to be those that operate under a city manager form of government. Padova stated that residents more often compare Gahanna to nearby suburbs rather than larger cities such as Columbus, noting that differences in size and structure make those comparisons less relevant. She explained that

the frequency of comparisons to suburban communities with city manager forms of government contributed to her decision to raise the issue for consideration. Vice Chair Wester asked whether a change in the form of government could affect the City's current momentum. Padova responded that she did not believe it would negatively impact progress but acknowledged uncertainty about future conditions. She stated that the City is currently in a strong position, supported by recent initiatives such as the strategic plan and capital improvement plan, which could help guide the City if changes were considered.

Commissioner Reynolds expressed appreciation for Padova's transparency in raising constituent concerns and noted that similar discussions had been heard informally.

The Chair asked for any additional questions. Hearing none, the Commission thanked Councilmember Padova for her time and participation.

2. Proposal Inventory Review

[2026-0050](#)

Draft Charter Amendment Proposals for Charter Review Commission 2026

Chair Barnhardt then moved to the next agenda item, the regular proposal inventory review. Given the late hour, the Chair indicated that the Commission would not engage in an in-depth review during that meeting. Chair Barnhardt noted that the Commission had concluded the public engagement phase and that upcoming meetings would focus on deliberation, discussion, and prioritization of approximately 25 proposals received throughout the process. He noted that an updated proposal log had been distributed, reflecting all submissions received as of April 3. The log organized proposals by Charter section, included brief descriptions, and identified potential impacts on other sections of the Charter. Barnhardt encouraged Commission members to review the document carefully, noting that some proposed changes may require corresponding updates elsewhere in the Charter. Barnhardt stated that additional proposals discussed during the meeting would be incorporated into the log and emphasized the importance of organizing approximately 25 proposals into a more manageable set of items for deliberation.

Chair Barnhardt then asked the City Attorney to provide guidance on

the ballot drafting process, noting that some proposals could be grouped together into single ballot measures rather than considered individually. City Attorney Tamilarasan explained that the Commission must consider how to package proposed changes for the ballot, as voters must approve or reject each measure in its entirety and cannot vote on individual components within a single proposal. She stated that the Commission should carefully determine which changes are closely related and should be combined into a single ballot initiative. City Attorney Tamilarasan advised that grouping related changes, such as standardizing residency requirements across multiple sections, could help maintain consistency within the Charter. She cautioned that combining unrelated items into a single measure could result in voters rejecting the entire proposal if they object to any one component. City Attorney Tamilarasan offered to prepare draft groupings of proposals for the Commission's review and stated that the Commission could then provide guidance on how items should be organized into ballot measures based on their priorities and rationale.

Chair Barnhardt asked whether Commission members had questions regarding the ballot drafting process. Vice Chair Wester expressed appreciation for the work completed in organizing the proposal log and emphasized the importance of prioritizing items as the Commission approaches the July 1 deadline for submitting recommendations to Council. She noted that, while many proposals may be valid, the Commission must focus on those that will have the greatest impact and are most appropriate for voter consideration, given the potential for ballot fatigue.

Chair Barnhardt outlined a proposed approach for upcoming meetings, including refining and grouping proposals into potential ballot measures with assistance from the City Attorney. The Chair identified three key areas for Commission members to consider: determining which proposals are appropriate for the Charter versus administrative or legislative action, identifying proposals that require additional information or expert input, and evaluating which items constitute structural changes versus housekeeping updates. Chair Barnhardt encouraged members to prepare for deliberation by reviewing the proposal list and considering these factors. He stated that organizing proposals into grouped ballot measures would help reduce the number of items under consideration and allow the Commission to focus on prioritization using its established framework.

Commissioner Reynolds asked whether feedback could be submitted in writing if they were unable to attend a future meeting. Chair Barnhardt stated that members could submit written comments to be read into the record, and the City Attorney clarified that information may be shared but Commissioners must not engage in dialogue outside of a public meeting.

Commissioner Maxwell clarified prior remarks, stating his concern regarding the form of government discussion related to feasibility within the Commission's timeframe rather than opposition to public input.

Chair Barnhardt reiterated the three "homework" items for Commission members: reviewing proposals to identify those not appropriate for Charter inclusion, identifying items requiring additional stakeholder input or expertise, and categorizing proposals as structural or housekeeping in preparation for prioritization.

F. CORRESPONDENCE AND ACTIONS.

[2026-0061](#)

Charter Review Commission Correspondence Received via Clerk

None.

G. POLL MEMBERS FOR COMMENT.

Commissioner Mularski expressed appreciation for Clerk VanMeter's work in preparing Commissioners for the meeting.

Vice Chair Wester remarked on the number of changes proposed, comparing Gahanna's many charter amendments through its municipal history to the few of the United States Constitution.

Chair Barnhardt thanked Commission members for their participation and acknowledged the length and depth of the meeting.

H. ADJOURNMENT.

With no further business before the Charter Review Commission, Chair Barnhardt adjourned the meeting at 8:42 p.m.

Jeremy A. VanMeter
Clerk of Council

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

Ethan Barnhardt

DRAFT