

City of Gahanna

Meeting Minutes

Committee of the Whole

200 South Hamilton Road
Gahanna, Ohio 43230

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, March 24, 2025

7:00 PM

City Hall, Council Chambers

A. CALL TO ORDER:

Gahanna City Council met for Committee of the Whole on Monday, March 24, 2025, in Council Chambers. Vice President of Council Trenton I. Weaver, Chair, called the meeting to order at 7:01 p.m. The agenda was published on March 21, 2025. All members were present for the meeting. There were no additions or corrections to the agenda.

B. ITEMS FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION:

ORD-0010-2025

AN ORDINANCE TO AUTHORIZE THE MAYOR TO ENTER INTO AN EASEMENT AGREEMENT WITH COLUMBIA GAS OF OHIO, INC

Stephania Ferrell, Director of Parks and Recreation, informed Council that the first three items on the agenda under Parks and Recreation, along with the first item under Engineering, were related to the same topic. She requested to discuss the items collectively before addressing them individually, if needed. Ferrell explained that Columbia Gas of Ohio proposed a pipeline replacement project, which would traverse multiple park parcels. The project involved approximately 19,000 feet of 24-inch pipeline. Columbia Gas requested a permanent easement through several park parcels to construct and maintain the pipeline. Ferrell noted that there were three separate ordinances related to this project: one for the permanent easement, another for a perpetual access easement to allow ongoing maintenance, and a third for a temporary construction easement necessary for the pipeline's initial installation. She stated that the values of these easements were included in the supplemental documentation provided in the Council's packet. Ferrell added that the next item under the Engineering report would contribute to the overall understanding of the project and then turned the discussion over to Tom Komlanc, Director of Engineering.

Director Komlanc explained that, to facilitate the pipeline work, Columbia Gas planned to install a regulator station at the Shephard Church, just off Cliffview. To achieve a required lot split for the station, the parcel needed frontage on a

public right-of-way in order to comply with zoning requirements. The proposed extension of Cliffview, by 50 feet, would provide the necessary connectivity to the parcel. A total of four ordinances would be required to accomplish the easement and right-of-way access needed by Columbia Gas of Ohio.

Councilmember McGregor asked if the facility at Cliffview would be above ground and whether it would be large. Komlanc responded affirmatively. McGregor then asked if there were any other similar facilities nearby. Komlanc indicated there likely were and stated that staff could provide overall site information, including location details. He assured Council that, as the project advanced, screening, fencing, and isolation measures would be implemented as appropriate. McGregor asked if this was the same facility that was previously considered for a location off Hamilton, and Komlanc confirmed that it was.

Councilmember Schnetzer stated that the map was difficult to interpret and asked staff to clarify the location of the project, specifically whether it was near Price Road and whether it would cross the creek. Director Ferrell confirmed that the project would be located behind the Price Road building and would run alongside the existing multi-use trail. She noted that the pipeline would bore underneath the creek and access the area where the trail dead-ends at Rocky Fork. Schnetzer then asked whether the pipeline would be located to the north or south of the Price Road House. Ferrell responded that it would be north of the house and south of the garage building. Schnetzer reviewed the compensation values listed in the documentation and expressed concern about the limitations utility easements can place on property use. He asked whether the proposed compensation was adequate and whether any future improvements in the area were considered. Ferrell replied that staff requested evaluations of the easement area and a tree impact evaluation, and that those values were included in the supplemental materials.

Councilmember Padova referred to the drawing attached to Ordinance No. 0013-2025 and confirmed with Komlanc that it showed the location of the proposed regulator station. She asked whether there would be landscaping, fencing, or other visual barriers included. Komlanc stated that fencing and landscaping would be part of the project but had not yet been finalized, as it would go through a separate review process following the lot split. Padova asked whether the entire square shown in the drawing represented the area that would be fenced. Komlanc confirmed that the fenced area would encompass the entire 150-by-150-foot square, which included a 50-foot separation between the fenced area and the adjacent property. He also noted that the multi-use trail provided connectivity through that area, with about 50 feet of space between the property line and the trail. Padova then asked how access would be gained for construction, whether via the trail from Cliffview or across from the church. Komlanc explained that the plan indicated access would be from Cliffview. When asked about the project timeline, Komlanc stated that staff was still working through those details as part of the

right-of-way permit process. Komlanc said the anticipated start time was in 2026 or 2027, but the number of crews and duration of construction had yet to be determined. Padova expressed appreciation for staff efforts in identifying a better location for the regulator station, noting that other proposed sites were less ideal. She acknowledged that the selected site was more secluded but voiced concern for residents living nearby, particularly one whose driveway ended at the Cliffview dead-end. She emphasized the importance of ensuring that residents maintained access to their driveways and experienced minimal disruption during construction. Other than those concerns, she had no further questions.

Councilmember Jones raised a question regarding language in the agreement, specifically noting a clause stating that the agreement was non-recordable, except in meeting minutes, and that it should not be recorded with Franklin County. She asked if there was a reason for this, mentioning that it was not language she had encountered before and wondered whether it was standard legal language. City Attorney Tamarasani responded that the supplemental agreement reflected a desire for the document to remain inaccessible through the County Recorder's website and not be attached to the land. She explained that while the agreement would not be recorded with the county, it would remain part of the Council record and was still a public record under public records laws. She likened it to a non-disclosure agreement, framed within the legal boundaries of what the city could agree to.

Councilmember Renner added that, although he was not an attorney, Ohio Revised Code 149.43 addressed infrastructure tied to national security purposes. He stated that natural gas infrastructure, like water and sewer, fell into this category, and it was common to avoid publicizing the locations of such utilities for security reasons. Tamarasani confirmed Renner's statement and noted that infrastructure records less than 25 years old were exempt from public records laws. This included gas, water, and plumbing lines, as well as building infrastructure for public buildings.

President Bowers asked if the cost of the amended pathway would be covered by Columbia Gas. Director Ferrell confirmed that Columbia Gas would cover the cost.

Vice President Weaver inquired about communication with residents and nearby property owners, asking what outreach would look like and who would be responsible for it. Ferrell clarified that, for the evening's discussion, the request pertained only to access. She stated that Columbia Gas had its own communications team and that, in coordination with the city's communications team, finalized details and impacts would be shared with affected residents in a timely manner.

**Recommendation: Introduction/First Reading on Regular Agenda on 4/7/2025;
Second Reading/Adoption on Consent Agenda on 4/21/2025.**

ORD-0011-2025

**AN ORDINANCE TO AUTHORIZE THE MAYOR TO ENTER INTO A
TEMPORARY CONSTRUCTION EASEMENT WITH COLUMBIA GAS**

OF OHIO, INC

Recommendation: Introduction/First Reading on Regular Agenda on 4/7/2025;
Second Reading/Adoption on Consent Agenda on 4/21/2025.

[ORD-0012-2025](#)

AN ORDINANCE TO AUTHORIZE THE MAYOR TO ENTER INTO AN ACCESS AND GENERAL UTILITY EASEMENT WITH COLUMBIA GAS OF OHIO, INC

Recommendation: Introduction/First Reading on Regular Agenda on 4/7/2025;
Second Reading/Adoption on Consent Agenda on 4/21/2025.

C. ITEMS FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGINEERING:

[ORD-0013-2025](#)

AN ORDINANCE TO ACCEPT THE DEDICATION OF 0.057 ACRES OF RIGHT-OF-WAY EXTENSION FROM PARCEL NO. 025-012951 LOCATED OFF OF CLIFFVIEW DRIVE FOR THE PURPOSE OF FACILITATING A FUTURE LOT SPLIT FOR THE CONSTRUCTION OF A REGULATOR STATION BY COLUMBIA GAS OF OHIO, INC.

Recommendation: Introduction/First Reading on Regular Agenda on 4/7/2025;
Second Reading/Adoption on Consent Agenda on 4/21/2025.

[ORD-0014-2025](#)

AN ORDINANCE TO ACCEPT THE DEDICATION OF 0.071 ACRES OF RIGHT-OF-WAY FROM PROPERTY LOCATED AT 4720 SHULL ROAD TO COMPLY WITH THE CITY'S 2019 THOROUGHFARE PLAN.

Tom Komlanc, Director of Engineering, reported that he had six additional items to present, though he explained that a couple remaining items were not yet finalized. Komlanc introduced the first item, which involved a proposed lot split at 4720 Shull Road. He noted that the property did not conform to the right-of-way requirements for Shull Road, which called for a 50-foot total right-of-way, 25 feet from the centerline on each side. On the west side of the property, the right-of-way was only 20 feet from the centerline. The proposal would secure the additional 5 feet needed to meet the requirement as part of the subdivision without plat process.

There was no additional discussion.

Recommendation: Introduction/First Reading on Regular Agenda on 4/7/2025;
Second Reading/Adoption on Consent Agenda on 4/21/2025.

[RES-0012-2025](#)

A RESOLUTION TO AMEND RESOLUTION 0009-2024 TO REVISE THE 2025 SIDEWALK MAINTENANCE PROGRAM AREA

Director Komlanc presented the next item, which involved amending the designated area for the 2025 Sidewalk Program. He stated that the amendment would remove Moorfield and add Beaverbrook to the program. Komlanc explained that the removal of Moorfield was based on anticipated future improvements in the area. Specifically, waterline work was scheduled for White Swan and Embassy Court in 2027. In consideration of coordinating infrastructure projects efficiently, staff determined it would be best to remove

Moorfield from the 2025 sidewalk schedule.

There was no additional discussion.

Recommendation: Introduction/Adoption on Consent Agenda on 4/7/2025.

ORD-0015-2025

AN ORDINANCE TO AUTHORIZE THE MAYOR TO AWARD AND ENTER INTO A CONTRACT WITH DECKER CONSTRUCTION COMPANY FOR THE 2025 STREET AND SIDEWALK MAINTENANCE PROGRAM (ST-1114)

Director Komlanc presented a recommendation to award the contract for the 2025 Street and Sidewalk Maintenance Program to Decker Construction. He also recommended approval of the alternatives included in the bid, which covered pavement marking and the addition of resurfacing Cherry Road on the west side, just off West Johnstown Road.

President Bowers asked whether the city had requested any employment or compensation standards from the contractor, such as benefits, minimum pay, or union status. Komlanc responded that the contractor would be required to follow the prevailing wage rates established by the State of Ohio.

Recommendation: Introduction/First Reading on Regular Agenda on 4/7/2025; Second Reading/Adoption on Consent Agenda on 4/21/2025.

RES-0013-2025

A RESOLUTION DETERMINING THE NECESSITY TO REPAIR AND/OR REPLACE SIDEWALKS IN THE 2026 SIDEWALK MAINTENANCE PROGRAM AREA FOR THE CITY OF GAHANNA

Director Komlanc introduced the next two items, both related to planning for 2026. The first item set the area for the 2026 Sidewalk Maintenance Program, and the second item addressed the 2026 Sidewalk Lookback Program.

Vice President Weaver asked for clarification on the timeline for the 2026 sidewalk program and the lookback program, noting that there were several iterations of these programs in recent years. He wanted to understand when the actual work would take place. Komlanc explained that the work would be performed in 2026 as part of the scheduled program. He stated that this early action served to notify residents in advance that they were included in the 2026 program, which would give them sufficient time to hire a contractor to perform the work themselves if desired, or to go through the appeals process if they believed their sidewalk areas were compliant with Public Right-of-Way Accessibility Guidelines (PROWAG) standards. Following that process, the city would proceed to the bidding phase in 2026. Weaver confirmed that both the sidewalk and lookback programs were ideally aligned with recent street improvements. Komlanc clarified that the 2026 sidewalk program would follow the mill and overlay work scheduled for that same year. The lookback program, by contrast, reviewed work completed in 2021, 2022, and 2023 to bring those areas up to the city's current maintenance standards.

Councilmember Jones asked Komlanc to confirm that residents in the 2026

program would be notified this year, and Komlanc confirmed that they would. Jones then asked if residents included in the 2025 program were already notified, and Komlanc affirmed that they had.

Recommendation: Introduction/Adoption on Consent Agenda on 4/7/2025.

RES-0014-2025

A RESOLUTION DETERMINING THE NECESSITY TO REPAIR AND/OR REPLACE SIDEWALKS IN THE 2026 SIDEWALK MAINTENANCE LOOKBACK PROGRAM AREA FOR THE CITY OF GAHANNA

Recommendation: Introduction/Adoption on Consent Agenda on 4/7/2025.

RES-0015-2025

A RESOLUTION DECLARING THE CITY OF GAHANNA'S INTENT TO PARTICIPATE FINANCIALLY IN THE WYNNE RIDGE COURT BRIDGE REPLACEMENT PROJECT (ODOT PROJECT NO. 116417) AND AUTHORIZING THE MAYOR TO ENTER INTO A PARTICIPATORY AGREEMENT WITH THE OHIO DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

Director Komlanc reported that the city was coordinating with the Ohio Department of Transportation on the reconstruction of the Wynne Ridge Bridge. He stated that the project was scheduled to go out for bidding and award in April of 2025, with the earliest possible construction start date anticipated in July of 2025. He noted that more detailed information would become available once a contractor was selected and schedules were finalized.

Councilmember Schnetzer asked whether the project would result in any disruption to resident access in the area, which he believed included about five homes. Komlanc responded that access to residents would be maintained during construction and that the work would be completed in phases to ensure continued accessibility.

Recommendation: Introduction/Adoption on Consent Agenda on 4/7/2025.

D. ITEMS FROM COUNCILMEMBERS:

RES-0017-2025

A RESOLUTION CELEBRATING APRIL 2025 AS EARTH MONTH AND MAY 5-9, 2025 AS AIR QUALITY AWARENESS WEEK AND COMMITTING TO A MORE SUSTAINABLE GAHANNA

Vice President Weaver noted the first item was a proposed resolution distributed to Council, recognizing April 2025 as Earth Month. He then turned the floor over to President Bowers.

President Bowers explained that, as in previous years, the resolution aimed to recognize Earth Month in April and Earth Day on April 22, 2025. She noted a new addition this year: the inclusion of Air Quality Awareness Week. While the Environmental Protection Agency designated May 5-9, 2025, for Air Quality Awareness Week, she felt it was close enough to the end of April to include it within the same resolution for continuity of recognition. Bowers

extended her thanks to Management Analyst Jessica Hilts for assistance in drafting the resolution. She apologized for the late distribution of the draft to Council and welcomed comments.

Councilmember Schnetzer, referencing the short time Council had to review the resolution, suggested a change to the title. He proposed modifying it from "To a Greener Gahanna" to "To a More Sustainable Gahanna," noting that the resolution's content focused heavily on efficiency and sustainability. He felt "sustainable" better aligned with the text.

President Bowers responded that she debated the title herself and acknowledged Schnetzer's point about the alliteration. She explained that the phrase "Cleaner, Greener Gahanna" was originally inspired by Make Gahanna Yours, which uses the phrase for its litter cleanup efforts.

Recommendation: Introduction/Adoption on Consent Agenda on 4/7/2025.

Councilmember Bowers: Senate Bill 63 Discussion

Vice President Weaver noted a request to add a brief discussion item concerning Senate Bill 63 and turned the floor over to President Bowers.

President Bowers informed Council that she wanted to bring Senate Bill 63 to their attention, especially following previous conversations regarding legislation that sought to preempt local control and home rule. She explained that this bill was introduced in a previous session but did not pass during the 135th General Assembly. It had since been reintroduced in the 136th General Assembly. Bowers stated that Senate Bill 63 would prohibit and restrict local governments from self-determining methods of conducting elections. Specifically, the bill sought to ban ranked choice voting, effectively limiting municipalities to either a two-party or fully nonpartisan electoral system. She emphasized that Gahanna currently operates under a nonpartisan system for electing local officials and expressed concern that this legislation would infringe on the city's home rule authority and decision-making autonomy. She noted that opponent testimony on the bill was scheduled for the following day and that an open letter was circulating among local elected officials in opposition to the bill, urging protection of home rule in Ohio. Bowers offered to circulate both the open letter and additional information about ranked choice voting to Council members. She clarified that she was not advocating for or against ranked choice voting itself, but rather emphasizing the importance of resisting preemption and defending local control.

Councilmember Bowers: Continued Discussion of Elected Official Salaries

[2025-0045](#)

Memo to Council re Elected Official Salaries 02.21.2025

President Bowers reopened discussion on elected official salaries, referencing a previous meeting from earlier in the year, where Councilmembers requested additional information on the total financial impact

of proposed salary increases. She emphasized that the purpose of the discussion was to share information and gather feedback-not to pressure any decisions. She directed Council to Legislation File 2025-0045, where Clerk VanMeter added a financial attachment under item eight, with data provided by Director of Finance Joann Bury. President Bowers summarized the proposed salary changes and their financial impacts. For the Mayor's position, the current salary of \$103,809 would increase to \$130,000 beginning in 2028. This change would result in a total additional annual cost of \$30,829, including a \$3,666 increase in Ohio Public Employees Retirement System (OPERS) contributions and less than \$1,000 combined for Medicare, workers' compensation, and life insurance. For the City Attorney, the current salary of \$80,765 would increase to \$110,000 annually, resulting in an additional annual cost of \$34,411-about \$5,000 in benefits and \$29,000 in salary. For City Councilmembers, the current salary of \$9,600 per member would increase to \$12,750. With seven members, the total additional annual cost would be approximately \$7,400, including increases in OPERS, Medicare, and workers' compensation contributions. Altogether, if all proposed salary increases were implemented, the total additional annual cost to the city would be \$72,600.

Vice President Weaver raised a previous question regarding the effective timing of the ordinances. He noted that the City Attorney's office and Assistant City Attorney Roth examined whether all Council salary changes could take effect simultaneously, even though ward terms might be mid-cycle. City Attorney Tamilarasan confirmed that, per Charter, salaries must be set term-by-term, but the effective date could fall midterm if predetermined before petitions were filed. The salary must remain unchanged throughout the term. She stated that it would be consistent with the Charter to implement all salary changes starting in 2028, even if that meant the changes would take effect mid-term for ward seats and at the beginning of the term for at-large seats.

Councilmember McGregor noted that similar incremental approaches were used in the past, including with the Mayor's salary, where different amounts applied in different years of a term.

Councilmember Jones asked for clarification on whether the proposed changes would be incremental or fixed. Vice President Weaver clarified that the current proposal would set all salary changes to take effect on the same date at the new rates.

Councilmember McGregor added that the ordinance might specify different amounts for staggered years if a different structure were chosen.

Councilmember Jones then asked for additional clarity about OPERS, specifically how service credit would be affected by the increase. She referenced prior information from Director Bury and a conversation with Senior Director Miranda Vollmer. Director Bury responded that Councilmembers already met the minimum salary requirement to earn a full year of service credit for pension purposes. Although the minimum required

salary changes annually, the current salary still qualified. She confirmed that the proposed increase would also meet the higher threshold required for eligibility in the OPERS Health Reimbursement Account (HRA) program.

President Bowers clarified that, based on her understanding and confirmation from OPERS, while current salaries allowed Councilmembers to earn pension service credit, they did not qualify members for health insurance eligibility through OPERS upon retirement. The proposed increase would ensure eligibility for the HRA benefit. Bury confirmed that while eligibility for the HRA would be achieved at the increased salary, OPERS did not guarantee any future provision of that benefit and emphasized that the HRA was not the same as a traditional health insurance plan.

Councilmember Schnetzer cited information from the OPERS website, noting that the minimum monthly salary required for pension credit in 2025 was \$734.07. He explained that Councilmembers currently exceeded that amount, and even with annual adjustments, their compensation would remain above the required threshold through at least 2029. He acknowledged that the threshold for health care credit was significantly higher. Bury confirmed that the health care threshold was currently \$1,000 per month in earnable salary. Senior Director Vollmer further clarified the distinction between a Health Reimbursement Account (HRA) and a Health Savings Account (HSA). She explained that an HRA consisted of employer-provided funds that were reimbursed to the retiree upon submission of eligible health expenses. Unlike an HSA, the funds in an HRA remained the property of the employer and were not individually owned or contributed to by the retiree.

Councilmember Jones asked whether individuals could elect to contribute to an HRA. Bury replied that only employers or the retirement system could fund an HRA; individuals could not contribute.

President Bowers, referencing the OPERS website, reiterated that \$1,000 per month in earnable salary was required to qualify for any retiree health insurance benefit through OPERS. She emphasized that current salaries fell below this amount, but the proposed increases would meet the requirement. Vollmer explained that OPERS no longer provided a direct health insurance plan for all members. Instead, eligible retirees accessed a marketplace portal and used HRA funds to purchase coverage. She added that the reimbursement rarely covered the full cost of health insurance. Bury noted that OPERS had significantly reduced its health benefits over time and that continued eligibility for the HRA benefit in the future could not be guaranteed.

Vice President Weaver expressed his support for aligning all salary adjustments to begin at the start of the same calendar year. He appreciated the clarification from the City Attorney's office. Weaver also noted his surprise at recent comments from Mayor Jadwin opposing the salary increase for the Mayor's position, stating they contradicted earlier remarks made during a monthly leadership meeting. He acknowledged that while all elected officials knew the compensation when they ran for office, the current discussion

centered on long-term planning and future terms, in line with Charter requirements that prohibit elected officials from adjusting their own salaries during their current term.

Mayor Jadwin responded, stating unequivocally that she never expressed support for increasing the Mayor's salary. She emphasized her consistent position on the issue and affirmed her opposition. She referenced the city's 2019 Issue 12 ballot initiative, which addressed a backlog of capital and facility maintenance projects and highlighted underinvestment in human capital at that time. While she credited Council for progress in improving staff compensation and retention, she reiterated that now was not the appropriate time to increase the Mayor's salary and reaffirmed her opposition.

Councilmember Schnetzer shifted the discussion to the proposed City Attorney salary increase, noting that the supporting data was less robust compared to the other positions. Referring to a memo with comparative salary data, he questioned how many of the listed municipalities allowed their city attorneys to maintain private legal practices. He suggested that understanding those policies would be important for evaluating compensation. President Bowers responded that in communities where City Attorneys are hired rather than elected, restrictions on outside employment were typically limited or nonexistent. She acknowledged that City Attorney comparisons were the most difficult to evaluate. Vice President Weaver pointed to attachment four in the meeting materials-the 2023 Ohio Municipal League (OML) City Salary Survey-and noted that columns Y and Z contained employment status information for some municipalities. Schnetzer appreciated the direction and agreed to conduct additional review on his own, reaffirming that the complexity of the City Attorney role warranted further information before a final decision could be made. City Attorney Tamilarasan added that the International Municipal Lawyers Association (IMLA) compiled a comprehensive survey on City Attorney positions across the country. She offered to circulate the full report and a summarized version for Council review. She also noted that the Assistant City Attorney in Gahanna was a full-time salaried employee who was permitted to perform outside legal work, such as municipal prosecutions or serving as a magistrate, provided there was no interference or conflict with city duties. Schnetzer acknowledged the explanation and noted that Gahanna's City Attorney role had evolved over time from part-time with no benefits, to a full-time position with benefits, while still permitting outside practice. He expressed a desire for more complete data before proceeding with that portion of the proposal.

Senior Director Vollmer clarified that although the Assistant City Attorney was a full-time employee, city policy required that any outside paid work-such as serving another jurisdiction-must be done on accrued paid leave. She explained that employees may not simultaneously receive compensation from the city while working for another employer, citing ethical standards. She provided examples of other employees who held secondary roles and reiterated that such work must be conducted on personal time.

Vice President Weaver thanked Vollmer for the clarification. Noting the volume of requests for additional information, he asked whether there was interest in referring the discussion back to committee for further review. He proposed April 14, 2025, as a potential date. President Bowers responded that the March 14, 2025, committee agenda would likely be full and suggested April 28, 2025, instead. Weaver confirmed the proposal to bring all three salary-related items-Mayor, City Attorney, and Councilmember compensation-back to committee on April 28, 2025.

[ORD-0005-2025](#) AN ORDINANCE TO AMEND SECTION 131.07 OF THE CODIFIED ORDINANCES OF THE CITY OF GAHANNA, RELATIVE TO THE MAYOR'S SALARY, EFFECTIVE JANUARY 2, 2028

Recommendation: Held in Committee; Further Discussion Scheduled 4/28/2025.

[ORD-0006-2025](#) AN ORDINANCE TO AMEND SECTION 143.04 OF THE CODIFIED ORDINANCES OF THE CITY OF GAHANNA, RELATIVE TO THE CITY ATTORNEY'S SALARY, EFFECTIVE JANUARY 3, 2028

Recommendation: Held in Committee; Further Discussion Scheduled 4/28/2025.

[ORD-0007-2025](#) AN ORDINANCE TO AMEND SECTION 121.03 OF THE CODIFIED ORDINANCES OF THE CITY OF GAHANNA, RELATIVE TO THE COUNCIL'S SALARY, EFFECTIVE JANUARY 2, 2026 FOR WARD MEMBERS, AND JANUARY 2, 2028 FOR AT-LARGE MEMBERS

Recommendation: Held in Committee; Further Discussion Scheduled 4/28/2025.

Update on Community Grants Program

[2025-0069](#) Community Grants Update to Council 3.24.2025

Senior Deputy Director of Administrative Services Corey Wybensing presented an update on the City's Community Grant Program as part of the 2025 departmental updates. He noted that the program was discussed during the budget process and introduced Director of Finance Joann Bury, who would provide information on local revenue sources at the end of the update. Wybensing provided an overview of the program, summarizing its implementation in 2023 and 2024. Over the two years, the City invested \$150,000 in local nonprofits, funded through American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) dollars. In 2023, the City awarded \$50,000 across nine grants from ten applicants. In 2024, the City awarded \$100,000 to 15 nonprofits from 20 applications. The purpose of the Community Grant Program is to assist nonprofit organizations with projects that provide community-wide benefits. With the transition from federal ARPA funds to local dollars for the 2025 program, the City plans to implement increased oversight and new requirements to reduce risk and liability.

Wybensing outlined the program's evaluation priorities, which remain

consistent with previous years. Tier 1A includes basic human necessities such as food and clothing insecurity. Tier 1B includes mental health services and social health issues. Tier 2 includes safety, health, and welfare-related services such as housing, transportation, and utility assistance. Tier 3, previously Tier 2, includes general community improvement initiatives. The Grant Review Committee was restructured from three members to five, consisting of two mayoral appointees, two Council appointees (already identified), and one city staff member. The Department of Administrative Services (DAS) will continue to facilitate the program but will not participate in grant award decisions. Applicants will receive notice of award or non-award, and DAS will offer assistance to any applicant needing clarification. The Committee may approve awards up to the 2025 program budget of \$100,000.

Wybensinger reviewed key program guidelines. Nonprofits must be Internal Revenue Service (IRS) registered and based in Gahanna, directly serving the Gahanna community or Gahanna-Jefferson School District. At least 51% of program beneficiaries must reside in this defined area. Administrative costs are capped at 10% of total funding. The program will shift to a reimbursement-based model instead of issuing advance payments. Reimbursement requests will be processed within 30 days, though turnaround will typically be faster. Awards will be capped at \$10,000 per application to promote equity and inclusion across more nonprofits. The average award over the past two years has ranged between \$5,000 and \$6,000, with the smallest award being \$850. New reporting and compliance steps include the use of standardized City forms for progress updates, a minimum of one session with DAS staff upon award to clarify program expectations, and grant closeout documents and reimbursement request forms provided by the City. Additional meetings may be required as needed. Administrative monitoring will continue under DAS. Wybensinger noted that some 2023 awards, particularly those related to mental health, are still active due to the long-term nature of the projects. Similarly, some 2024 projects involving food insecurity and community gardening are ongoing, with planting season expected to yield measurable results in the near future. Award notifications will be presented to Council, as done in previous years, along with updates on significant projects. The goal is to finalize all 2025 projects by December 31, 2025. Extensions may be granted if justified, but multi-year projects will be discouraged due to the administrative burden. Assuming an April 1, 2025, launch date, the City plans to offer an approximately 24-day application window. Applications will be accepted via OpenGov, email, or paper drop-off, continuing the methods used in previous years. Awards are expected to be announced by June 2, followed by the monitoring and reporting process through year-end.

Funding Considerations for 2025 Program

Director Bury discussed potential funding sources to support the Community Grant Program moving forward, emphasizing that no new revenue streams were being proposed-only the reallocation of existing funds. She explained

that several non-tax revenues are already earmarked or restricted by policy, ordinance, or Ohio Revised Code, including fees collected on behalf of the state, county, or other entities. After filtering out restricted revenue, three possible funding sources remained:

1. **Liquor Permit Fees:** Approximately \$40,000 annually, collected by the Council Office and historically used to offset administrative costs. There are no policy restrictions preventing its use for grant funding.
2. **Interest Revenue:** Estimated at \$5 million for 2025, though expected to decrease by half or more once economic conditions stabilize. Interest revenue has been used to support debt service transfers and severance payouts (approximately \$500,000 annually). While volatile, this could be a possible source for grant funding.
3. **Local Government Fund (LGF):** Provides about \$1 million annually for general governmental purposes. Although already allocated across city programs, LGF could support the grant program.

Bury also identified a potential fourth source-the City's **1% lodging tax**, which is expected to generate \$67,000 in 2025. However, current ordinance language limits its use to special events, tourism promotion, or development projects that attract visitors. To use lodging tax revenue for the Community Grant Program, Council would need to amend the ordinance to expand eligible uses to include grants or community welfare initiatives. Bury concluded by emphasizing that the grant program originated from one-time American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) resources and was not intended to become a permanent service. If Council wishes to continue the program as an ongoing city service, it will need to be prioritized alongside other core services and funded only when General Fund revenues exceed annual appropriations. She recommended framing the program as a discretionary initiative supported by surplus or one-time revenue.

Councilmember Schnetzer expressed gratitude for the presentation and commended the evident effort put into revising and tightening the program parameters. He stated that the revisions would provide increased comfort to both the Council and the community. He noted that the terms "risk" and "liability" were mentioned multiple times and requested clarification on their meanings in the context of the program.

Deputy Director Wybensinger explained that in the first two years of the program, advanced payments were made based on selected programs, with funding disbursed prior to work being completed. This approach resembled paying a contractor before the job was finished, which involved a risk that the contractor might not deliver. To mitigate this risk and avoid liability, the City planned to use a reimbursement model instead. Under this structure, the City would verify reimbursement requests to ensure expenses aligned with the approved applications before any funds were released.

Councilmember Schnetzer acknowledged the explanation and reiterated that the reimbursement method reduced the risk of fraud by ensuring expenses were documented and pre-approved. He inquired further about the City's liability, to which Mr. Wybensing responded that liability would arise only if the City approved an application, agreed to specific terms and conditions, and then failed to reimburse despite the applicant fulfilling those terms.

Councilmember Schnetzer then shifted to the definition of "social health" and asked how the term would be applied within the program. Mr. Wybensing responded that while mental health and counseling services were clearly defined in previous applications, the term "social health" could include broader services such as mentorship, job readiness, resume writing, and interview preparation. The review committee would assess each application to determine whether a proposed service fit within this expanded scope.

Councilmember Schnetzer directed a question to Director Bury, referencing the Westerville program as an inspiration and asking if right-of-way fees were considered as a non-tax revenue source. Bury responded that those fees were designated to cover engineering costs and, under current ordinances, could not be redirected for program funding. Wybensing added that Worthington's community grant program, which inspired Gahanna's model, was originally funded through lodging taxes. However, even after their main hotel closed, Worthington's Council maintained the program using general fund revenue. Councilmember Schnetzer followed up by asking if the City received recurring revenue from cell phone tower leases. Bury confirmed that such funding existed but was allocated to Public Service to support the complex administration of tower contracts. She explained that she avoided recommending funding sources already committed to departmental operations.

President Bowers thanked staff for their work in enhancing the program's accountability and sustainability. She commended Councilmember Schnetzer for his contributions to the investment policy, noting that investment revenue exceeded projections for 2024. Bowers acknowledged Bury's proposal to use interest revenue as a funding source and expressed support for the idea, believing it aligned with good stewardship of City resources. Councilmember Schnetzer agreed and supported moving forward if the administration was in concurrence. President Bowers asked whether identifying interest revenue for the program would require a supplemental appropriation. Bury clarified that it would not, as it simply involved earmarking already-available General Fund interest income.

Councilmember McGregor asked if reimbursement could occur in multiple disbursements for ongoing programs. Mr. Wybensing stated the goal was to have a single reimbursement at the program's conclusion, aligning with other grant models. He explained that managing multiple reimbursements from many awardees would become administratively burdensome, but a complete reimbursement could typically be processed within 10 to 30 days.

after program close-out. McGregor suggested clarifying in the application that expenditures must be completed within 2025. Mr. Wybensinger confirmed this would be reflected in the timeline and shared with applicants. He noted that while the target close date was December 31, 2025, some flexibility could be granted for legitimate reasons, such as weather delays.

Mayor Jadwin asked if there would be only one application window and if all funds would be awarded during that time. Wybensinger confirmed that the application would open April 1, 2025, and close April 25, 2025, with no additional funding rounds planned. Jadwin then clarified McGregor's concern about programs extending beyond the application period, and Wybensinger reiterated that exceptions could be made under specific circumstances but would not be the normal mode of operation.

President Bowers asked for confirmation that the program transitioned to a reimbursement-only model. Wybensinger affirmed this. Bowers asked if the reimbursement model might hinder organizations seeking matching funds. Wybensinger responded that this would depend on the source of the matching funds but noted that an award letter or open purchase order might satisfy matching requirements. Director Bury added that a purchase order would serve as a legal encumbrance of funds, which should help applicants secure matching funds. Bowers stated that the lowered maximum award of \$10,000, coupled with the tighter review process and known community recipients, alleviated her concerns about risk. She expressed hope that the reimbursement requirement would not deter smaller organizations from applying.

Councilmember Jones raised the same concern about small nonprofits lacking upfront capital. She asked whether the City would consider applicants who could not pre-fund expenses. Wybensinger explained that any deviation from the reimbursement model would increase the City's risk. He emphasized the importance of financial reviews to ensure applicant stability. Bury added that most grant programs nationally also used a reimbursement model and clarified that the City's intent was to supplement, not replace, organizational fundraising.

Councilmember Padova asked if staff believed the reimbursement model would limit participation. Wybensinger responded that it likely would not, noting that most past recipients requested modest amounts, averaging \$2,500 to \$3,000. He indicated that applicants sometimes received support from other organizations, enabling successful project implementation. Padova then asked whether all application guidelines-including the \$10,000 cap-would be clearly shared with applicants. Mr. Wybensinger confirmed this and explained that the application packet included all relevant details. Padova asked whether the application encouraged collaboration among local nonprofits. Mr. Wybensinger confirmed that applicants were encouraged to list other Gahanna-based nonprofits that might benefit from the project, supporting a networked approach.

Councilmember McGregor asked if any past awardees defaulted after receiving funds upfront. Wybensing replied that there were no defaults, although some projects required additional support due to unforeseen complications. He emphasized that staff worked closely with recipients to ensure project success.

Councilmember Renner commended Senior Deputy Director Wybensing and Director Bury for their work in refining the program. He appreciated their efforts to incorporate Council feedback following budget discussions and noted their responsiveness to concerns raised during the process.

Vice President Weaver echoed Renner's sentiments, applauding the team for the program's improved structure and expressing support for the reimbursement model and the use of interest revenue as a funding source. He concluded the discussion, confirming that there were no further questions or comments from the Council and thanked staff once again for their thorough work.

Preliminary Discussion of Expansion of Lodging Tax to Short Term Rentals

President Bowers opened the discussion by highlighting Senate Bill 104, noting the bill's potential to preempt local regulation of short-term rentals while expanding lodging tax applicability to all such accommodations, including hotels and organizations such as, Airbnbs, and Vacation Rentals by Owner (VRBOs). She emphasized that other communities across Ohio already implemented similar measures and suggested Gahanna was currently missing out on potential revenue. President Bowers sought consensus from Council and suggested requesting that the administration begin work on implementing the expansion of the lodging tax.

Councilmember Schnetzer supported the idea, noting it would create a level playing field between hotels and short-term rentals, which currently operate under different tax obligations. He inquired whether Visit Gahanna provided any updates regarding their previous communications on short-term rentals.

Councilmember Padova responded that she was in contact with the Convention and Visitors Bureau. She explained that the Ohio Association of Convention and Visitors Bureaus (OACVB) opposed Senate Bill 104 overall but supported the expansion of lodging taxes to include short-term rentals. She noted that local hotel managers expressed concerns about losing business to Airbnbs, particularly for events like bridal parties, which ultimately affected the City's lodging tax revenue.

Mayor Jadwin confirmed that OACVB had submitted testimony in favor of expanding the lodging tax, while opposing other parts of the bill. She also mentioned that the organization might be preparing an alternative bill. The Ohio Realtors and Columbus Realtors also submitted proponent testimony supporting the tax. Mayor Jadwin expressed that, while some groups opposed Senate Bill 104 due to concerns over home rule, there was broad support for

taxing short-term rentals.

Vice President Weaver added that even some short-term rental operators supported the lodging tax component in their testimony, reiterating that the proposal helped ensure fairness across the hospitality sector.

Councilmember Renner voiced support for pursuing the lodging tax but expressed concerns about the broader implications of unregulated short-term rentals on neighborhood integrity. He cautioned that allowing widespread use of homes for rentals could alter the character of residential areas and raised rhetorical concerns about the future of property zoning and taxation.

Councilmember McGregor shared an example of problematic short-term rental use, where a home routinely hosted construction workers who parked numerous trucks in a small cul-de-sac, creating congestion and disorder. She expressed concern about the lack of on-site supervision and the disruption to neighborhoods.

Vice President Weaver clarified that this agenda item was meant as a preliminary conversation about lodging tax policy, but he also proposed that the Council plan a more robust discussion on regulatory options for short-term rentals at the April 28, 2025, Committee meeting.

President Bowers provided background, noting that she, along with the City Attorney, administration, and Council staff, conducted significant research in the past year on regulatory options. Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission (MORPC) intern Charlie Schneider and Management Analyst Jessica Hilts, compiled research on national and statewide legislative models and identified short-term rental properties within Gahanna. Bowers emphasized the importance of understanding what the City could legally do given constraints from existing case law and pending state legislation. She acknowledged that some communities banned short-term rentals, but such measures were likely not legally defensible. She expressed willingness to bring policy proposals forward, while noting that the uncertainty surrounding Senate Bill 104 created challenges in timing and planning.

Vice President Weaver agreed with the need for a proactive approach, especially regarding the lodging tax, while also suggesting the Council wait until April 28, 2025, to discuss regulatory strategies more fully. He emphasized the value of having a cohesive conversation before drafting legislation to avoid repeated amendments.

President Bowers supported moving forward with the lodging tax in the short term, suggesting it would benefit the community financially. Councilmember Schnetzer concurred, emphasizing the importance of acting soon on the lodging tax if there were no legal barriers, while recommending postponing broader regulatory efforts until the legislative landscape became clearer. President Bowers pointed out the risk of continued inaction, noting that similar preemption bills stalled in the past, only to resurface in future legislative

cycles. She stressed that Council should not wait indefinitely and must begin addressing the issue. Schnetzer acknowledged her point and reiterated his intention to avoid misdirected efforts should the legislation move forward unexpectedly quickly. President Bowers agreed but reaffirmed the importance of making progress on the lodging tax in the meantime.

Vice President Weaver concluded the discussion by proposing to set April 28, 2025, as the date for further conversation on regulatory options, while encouraging the administration to begin working on lodging tax expansion in the interim.

E. ITEMS FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF FINANCE:

[RES-0016-2025](#) A RESOLUTION REAFFIRMING THE CITY OF GAHANNA'S REPRESENTATIVE AND ALTERNATE TO THE REGIONAL INCOME TAX AGENCY (RITA) REGIONAL COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS (RCOG)

Director Bury requested a resolution to reaffirm herself as the Regional Income Tax Agency (RITA) main delegate and to appoint Crystal Jolley as the alternate delegate, replacing Chris Wright, who recently retired. She explained that as a member of RITA, the City receives representation on the Regional Council of Governments. The Mayor selects the delegates, and Council provides approval. She requested the resolution to name herself as the main delegate and Crystal Jolley as the alternate.

Vice President Weaver thanked Director Bury and, seeing no questions or discussion from Council, stated the item would be placed on the next consent agenda.

Recommendation: Introduction/Adoption on Consent Agenda on 4/7/2025.

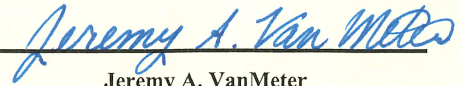
[ORD-0016-2025](#) AN ORDINANCE AUTHORIZING SUPPLEMENTAL APPROPRIATIONS - Clerk of Court Computer Fund (2290) for Capital Equipment

Director Bury explained that a capital improvement project for the Mayor's Court kiosk in the new municipal building was previously approved by the Capital Advisory Committee but was inadvertently left out of the appropriations. She requested an ordinance for supplemental appropriations to include the necessary funding for the project. There were no questions or comments from Council.

Recommendation: Introduction/First Reading on Regular Agenda on 4/7/2025; Second Reading/Adoption on Consent Agenda on 4/21/2025.

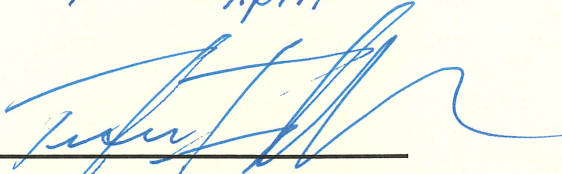
F. ADJOURNMENT:

With no further business before the Committee of the Whole, the Chair adjourned the meeting at 8:44 p.m.



Jeremy A. VanMeter
Clerk of Council

APPROVED by the Committee of the Whole, this
7th day of April 2025.



Trenton I. Weaver