



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, May 7, 2026

6:30 PM

Council Chambers, City Hall

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

Chair Ethan Barnhardt called the regular meeting of the Gahanna Charter Review Commission to order on Thursday, May 7, 2026, at 6:30 p.m. and led members in the Pledge of Allegiance. The agenda was published on May 1, 2026.

Present 7 - Ethan Barnhardt, Jamie Belisle, Edward A. Hill Jr., Richard Maxwell, Raymond J. Mularski, Karen Reynolds, and Carrin Wester

B. ADDITIONS OR CORRECTIONS TO THE AGENDA.

None.

C. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES.

[2026-0088](#)

Charter Review Commission Minutes 2026-04-23

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

Yes: 7 - Barnhardt, Belisle, Hill, Maxwell, Mularski, Reynolds and Wester

D. PUBLIC COMMENT.

None.

E. UNFINISHED BUSINESS.

Amendment to the Commission Process Architecture (Prioritization Matrix)

Chair Barnhardt opened discussion on the suggested amendment to the commission process architecture that the commission had tabled at the

previous meeting. He stated that the discussion continued the conversation from the prior meeting, during which the commission determined that it preferred to have the full commission present because the full commission had adopted the matrix and process architecture. He stated that it made sense to have everyone present before making any changes. Chair Barnhardt reminded the commission that, in the memorandum distributed prior to the previous meeting, he had recommended applying the prioritization matrix to all remaining draft ballot measures that had cleared the two thresholds. He explained that the matrix was intended to inform, but not dictate, the commission's decision-making by providing a consistent, transparent, and comparative basis for determining which measures would rise to the top. He then opened the floor for additional comments and discussion on the approach and stated that, at the appropriate time, he would entertain a motion to adopt the refinement before the commission began scoring later that evening.

Commissioner Belisle asked for clarification on whether Chair Barnhardt recommended using the prioritization matrix for simple housekeeping changes as well.

Chair Barnhardt responded that the commission initially had placed items into two tracks: housekeeping and structural. He stated that the framework had been beneficial in helping create the draft ballot measures because many housekeeping items could be grouped together. He explained that the framework made sense for refining the process and developing the draft ballot measures. He further stated that, after reducing the number of potential ballot measures from well over 20 to 13, the most efficient way to prioritize them would be to apply the matrix to all remaining ballot measures. He stated that doing so would provide a quantifiable number for each measure to help prioritize which measures to advance.

Commissioner Mularski asked Chair Barnhardt to restate the motion.

Chair Barnhardt stated that the commission could make a motion to amend the adopted prioritization architecture to apply the prioritization matrix to all remaining measures.

Commissioner Belisle asked whether Chair Barnhardt was putting forth

the motion. He noted he provided suggested language. Commissioner Belisle then made a motion to approve the amendment as stated by Chair Barnhardt. Vice Chair Wester seconded the motion.

A motion was made by Belisle, seconded by Wester, to amend the adopted prioritization architecture to apply the prioritization matrix to all remaining measures. The motion carried by the following vote:

Yes: 7 - Barnhardt, Belisle, Hill, Maxwell, Mularski, Reynolds and Wester

F. NEW BUSINESS.

Proposal Inventory Review and Deliberation

[2026-0050](#)

Draft Charter Amendment Proposals for Charter Review Commission 2026

Chair Barnhardt stated that the commission would move to the next item of new business, the proposal inventory review. He explained that, at the previous meeting, the commission had begun applying the threshold framework and narrowing the universe of proposals. He stated that the commission would continue that work and hoped to finish the threshold review and begin scoring and prioritization. Chair Barnhardt reminded the commission that the process involved three steps: determining whether an item was appropriate for the charter, determining whether the commission had sufficient information or education to evaluate it, and moving into deliberation and scoring. Because several members had been absent from the previous meeting, he reopened the floor for discussion on whether any remaining draft ballot measures did not belong in the charter and would be more appropriate for ordinance policy or administrative action. He invited commissioners who had not attended the previous meeting to share their thoughts on any items they believed were not charter-level matters.

Vice Chair Wester stated that the previous meeting had involved significant discussion and explained that Chair Barnhardt had guided the commission through three questions. She stated that the first question addressed whether a proposal belonged at the charter level and cited CRC 019, which involved excused absences and clarifications for the Planning Commission, as an example of a proposal the commission had eliminated because it did not belong in the charter. She stated that the second question addressed whether the commission needed more information or lacked sufficient information to evaluate a proposal.

Commissioner Reynolds asked whether, aside from the proposals already struck, the remaining 13 proposals represented the measures the commission planned to score that evening.

Chair Barnhardt confirmed that the commission had 13 remaining proposals unless members struck additional items. He added that the commission had also struck one individual section from draft ballot measure 11.

Commissioner Maxwell stated his understanding that the commission was examining the city council versus mayoral structure.

Chair Barnhardt confirmed that understanding and stated that, if no commissioners believed additional proposals should be eliminated as non-charter-level matters, the commission could move into discussion on that topic. He noted that the commission had tabled the matter previously to allow for additional context and discussion. He stated that the discussion concerned draft ballot measure number four, which addressed a council-manager form of government. Chair Barnhardt stated that commissioners present at the previous meeting had engaged in discussion and had received substantial education earlier in the process from a presenter invited to speak to the commission. He stated that the commission wanted to ensure all members had an opportunity to discuss the item and consider comments and suggestions submitted to the commission. He then opened the floor for discussion.

Commissioner Mularski asked whether the proposal had been placed in the category requiring more information. Chair Barnhardt confirmed that it had and asked for thoughts on the specific item.

Commissioner Belisle asked whether the commission was discussing striking the proposal or continuing discussion. Chair Barnhardt stated that the commission had not yet decided whether to strike the proposal, seek additional education, or determine whether the commission could adequately address the matter within the remaining timeframe. Commissioner Belisle stated that she understood the commission had issued a call to action for the community to provide additional information if members wanted the proposal to move forward. She stated that the commission had not received any additional information and moved to

strike proposal 27.

Commissioner Maxwell asked which proposal the commission discussed and stated that he believed Chair Barnhardt had referred to proposal four.

Chair Barnhardt acknowledged the confusion and explained that the commission had started with original proposals and later grouped them under ballot items. He clarified that the discussion concerned CRC 027. Commissioner Maxwell stated that CRC 027 was the proposal he had referenced. Chair Barnhardt acknowledged the clarification.

Commissioner Reynolds stated that, because she had not attended the previous meeting, she had reviewed approximately two hours of the prior discussion to become familiar with the issue. She stated that she did not believe the earlier presentation had fully developed into a learning discussion and noted that Councilmember Padova had introduced the topic broadly before the discussion shifted direction. Commissioner Reynolds stated that she wanted to hear more about Ms. Padova's comments because she believed the topic reflected concerns she heard within the community and from City Council. Commissioner Reynolds also stated that she agreed with a request submitted by Vice Chair Wester regarding the attachment addressing the city manager and appointment of the law director or law clerk. She stated that the proposed change carried significance for her and that she did not want to strike the proposal if that concept moved forward. She explained that she viewed the issues as connected because, if council selected one position, she believed Council should also select the other to reduce party involvement. She expressed concern about the expansion of leadership authority and referenced comments she had submitted by email regarding the absence of mayoral term limits and uncertainty about future leadership. She stated that she worried about the potential concentration of power within the city government. Commissioner Reynolds also referenced concerns about embedding the strategic plan into the charter and the possibility of increasing financial obligations, including annual costs associated with the strategic plan. She stated that she wanted the commission to continue discussing and considering the proposal and that she remained open to exploring new governmental structures and related proposals together.

Commissioner Belisle stated that she could not speak on behalf of Vice Chair Wester but explained that, based on their conversations, she interpreted Vice Chair Wester's submission as relating more to elector qualifications than to a change in government structure. She stated that she did not believe Vice Chair Wester had proposed changing to a city manager and law director structure and invited correction if her understanding was inaccurate.

Commissioner Mularski raised a point of order and asked to second the motion so the commission could discuss it. He noted that Commissioner Belisle's motion had not yet received a second. Commissioner Belisle clarified that her motion sought to strike proposal 27.

Vice Chair Wester clarified her earlier comments and stated that she wanted Commissioner Reynolds to have an opportunity to speak because Commissioner Reynolds had asked Councilmember Padova follow-up questions. Vice Chair Wester stated that the commission had remained open to feedback throughout the process. She acknowledged that Ms. Padova had presented comments and that several commissioners, including herself, had asked follow-up questions. Vice Chair Wester explained that she had looked for objective reasons explaining what problems the proposed form of government change would solve and stated that she had not heard those reasons. She stated that the commission lacked sufficient time to fully explore the issue and that both forms of government could function effectively, as many cities demonstrated. She stated that she had not heard why Gahanna specifically needed the change and asked what problem the proposal sought to solve. Vice Chair Wester stated that, because those answers remained unclear, she supported striking the proposal. She added that several commissioners, including Mr. Hill, Commissioner Belisle, and herself, had asked follow-up questions and stated that, if compelling reasons existed, the commission likely would have heard them by that point. Vice Chair Wester then addressed Commissioner Reynolds' earlier comments and stated that Commissioner Belisle had summarized her position accurately. She clarified that her proposal concerning an elected or hired city attorney did not involve a change in the form of government. She stated that City Attorney Tamilarasan had asked the commission to table that discussion until she could participate, and Vice Chair Wester stated that she respected that request. She explained that the proposal arose organically from comments made during the previous meeting regarding the pool of candidates available for highly skilled

positions such as city attorney. She stated that her proposal focused on the process for selecting the individual rather than changing the governmental structure itself.

Commissioner Reynolds stated that the clarification helped her understand the issue because she initially interpreted the proposal as involving a fully appointed position. She stated that, while the current system might not present problems now, she could envision future concerns. She expressed concern about future leadership and the possibility of individuals entering office with established teams and influence.

Vice Chair Wester clarified that her comments specifically addressed the city attorney position.

Commissioner Reynolds responded that she referred more generally to any long-term position. She acknowledged that she might not fully understand all aspects of the issue and welcomed further explanation. She asked whether an appointed city attorney would be selected by the Mayor or by City Council and stated that she wanted clarity regarding how any proposed language would function.

Vice Chair Wester stated that Commissioner Belisle had previously added a helpful comparison column to the discussion materials. She explained that 11 of the 14 cities in Franklin County employed an appointed or hired city attorney rather than an elected one and noted that Gahanna, Reynoldsburg, and Whitehall represented the only suburbs that still elected the position. Vice Chair Wester further stated that the charters of those cities varied in how they appointed the city attorney. Some allowed the city manager to appoint the position, while others required appointment by the mayor or city manager with confirmation by council. Vice Chair Wester stated that she personally preferred a collaborative process involving both council and the mayor because the city attorney worked closely with both branches of government and with the public. She stated that a vetting process involving both entities would create a beneficial outcome.

Commissioner Reynolds stated that the clarification helped her better understand the proposal because she previously interpreted it as involving sole appointment authority. She stated that she appreciated the

collaborative approach.

Vice Chair Wester stated that some communities did use sole appointment authority but reiterated that she preferred collaboration between council and the mayor.

Commissioner Reynolds asked whether the commission would need to draft the proposed language itself.

Commissioner Belisle stated that she had extensive thoughts on the issue but wanted to respect the decision to table the discussion until City Attorney Tamarasan returned. She stated that she would reserve her comments until that time.

Commissioner Hill stated that Commissioner Reynolds also had raised the separate issue of term limits. He stated that term limits could and should receive consideration but represented a separate issue from the discussion concerning the city attorney position.

Commissioner Reynolds agreed and referenced an email she had sent to the commission during her absence from the previous meeting. She stated that, if the commission struck the proposal, she would support introducing a proposal for four-year term limits, particularly if the strategic plan became part of the charter. She stated that she wanted to ensure future leadership would operate from a strong position and that future candidates would have opportunities to present their own visions for the city.

Commissioner Mularski asked whether the commission had returned to discussion of Commissioner Belisle's motion.

Chair Barnhardt stated that he wanted to note that Commissioner Reynolds' earlier comments carried weight because discussions concerning the form of government, city manager, and city attorney positions closely intertwined. He explained that the current strong mayor system included an elected mayor, elected city attorney, and elected city council, all of which served as checks and balances on each other. He contrasted that structure with a city manager form of government, where a city manager and city attorney typically served through appointment processes involving council oversight. Chair Barnhardt stated that

replacing an elected city attorney with an appointed one would introduce an element of city manager accountability into a mayoral system and remove one of the intended checks and balances. He questioned how disagreements between the mayor and council could create gridlock over appointing a city attorney and stated that such a process could make the position more political because competing branches of government might seek influence over the appointment. He expressed concern that perceptions could arise regarding whether a city attorney aligned too closely with either the mayor or council. Chair Barnhardt stated that those possibilities represented unintended consequences that the commission needed to consider carefully. Chair Barnhardt further noted that Gahanna, Whitehall, and Reynoldsburg all maintained elected city attorneys within strong mayor forms of government, while other communities in central Ohio operated under mayor-administrator or council-manager systems with different accountability structures. He reiterated that the city attorney discussion intertwined closely with broader questions about governmental structure and distribution of power. Chair Barnhardt referenced comments from Councilmember Schnetzer during an earlier meeting, stating that Councilmember Schnetzer had cautioned the commission against altering the mayoral system because the structure had been intentionally designed. Chair Barnhardt stated that the commission needed to identify the actual problems it sought to solve and carefully consider any unintended consequences. He then stated that he preferred to table both the city manager and city attorney discussions until the following week when City Attorney Tamilarasan returned.

Vice Chair Wester stated that she strongly disagreed with Chair Barnhardt's comments and stated that the commission could continue the discussion the following week. She reiterated that most strong mayor governments in Franklin County employed appointed or hired city attorneys rather than elected ones. She stated that she believed the hiring and appointment process emphasized qualifications, skill sets, and experience, while elections did not always focus on professional legal credentials. Vice Chair Wester stated that, in her view, the proposal would not change the function of the office itself but only the method of selecting the individual.

Chair Barnhardt stated that, despite the pending motion, he wanted to table the city manager and city attorney discussions until the following

week.

Commissioner Mularski called for the question. Chair Barnhardt stated that the commission would proceed to vote on Commissioner Belisle's motion.

Clerk VanMeter clarified that the motion concerned striking CRC 027.

A motion was made by Belisle, seconded by Mularski, to strike CRC 027 (Article III - Form of Government). The motion carried by the following vote:

Yes: 4 - Hill, Maxwell, Mularski and Wester

No: 3 - Barnhardt, Belisle and Reynolds

Chair Barnhardt asked whether the commission had any additional items that required further education or raised additional questions. He then announced that the previous motion had passed and that the commission had struck the form of government discussion.

Commissioner Belisle stated that she had another motion to strike. She moved to strike CRC 004 regarding the strategic plan. Commissioner Belisle explained that, after further review and considering comments received from members of the public, she questioned whether embedding a strategic plan into the charter fell within the purview of the commission. She stated that previous discussion had raised concerns that such a provision would prove too restrictive. She also questioned who would determine whether the city would pay for a strategic plan and stated that those matters did not fall within the commission's authority. Commissioner Belisle stated that she believed the commission should consider striking the proposal and asked whether the commission could open discussion on the matter.

Chair Barnhardt responded that, at that stage of the process, the purpose of striking proposals centered more on whether the commission possessed sufficient education, context, or time to discuss the item. He stated that he did not believe it was appropriate to strike the proposal at that point because the commission could still discuss and prioritize it, even if members ultimately chose not to advance it. Chair Barnhardt stated that, in his opinion, the proposal had not reached the threshold for removal during the educational review phase.

Vice Chair Wester asked for clarification on whether the commission

should suggest striking proposals only because of insufficient information at that point in the process. Chair Barnhardt confirmed that understanding.

Commissioner Belisle acknowledged that she had moved back a step in the process and apologized. She then asked whether the commission could still determine whether other members felt the same way because the motion had already been made.

Chair Barnhardt noted that the motion had not yet received a second and asked whether any commissioner wished to second it.

Commissioner Reynolds seconded the motion.

Clerk VanMeter clarified that the motion concerned striking CRC 004.

A motion was made by Belisle, seconded by Reynolds, to strike CRC 004 (Article III - Mayor: Strategic Plan Embedding). The motion failed by the following vote:

Yes: 2 - Belisle and Reynolds

No: 5 - Barnhardt, Hill, Maxwell, Mularski and Wester

Chair Barnhardt announced that the motion had failed. He then asked whether the commission had any additional items that required further education, time, capacity, or information before advancing.

Vice Chair Wester raised CRC 025 regarding the ward composition proposal. She stated that she believed someone intended to provide additional information on the matter, despite Councilmember Weaver already having submitted information. Vice Chair Wester stated that she may have misunderstood earlier discussion but recalled believing that Clerk VanMeter planned to contact someone for additional information. Clerk VanMeter stated that he did not recall that. Vice Chair Wester acknowledged that she might have remembered incorrectly and stated that Councilmember Weaver had already provided information from the Franklin County Board of Elections. She stated that she did not believe the commission possessed sufficient information to determine whether the proposal represented a valid change. Vice Chair Wester explained that the information provided did not adequately demonstrate how changing ward boundaries would affect the city moving forward. She stated that she did not feel comfortable advancing the proposal and

moved to strike CRC 025.

Commissioner Maxwell seconded the motion.

Chair Barnhardt stated that he agreed with Vice Chair Wester's concerns. He explained that he had requested information showing what the actual ward changes and maps would look like and considered that information important before recommending such a change. Chair Barnhardt stated that, based on the current stage of the process, he agreed with the motion to strike. He then invited additional comments.

Commissioner Belisle stated that she believed the commission already had enough information because previous discussion suggested that the language change would not significantly alter ward boundaries. She stated that she believed the proposal should move into the prioritization phase because the commission had reviewed all available data. Commissioner Belisle also recalled that the commission had appeared divided on the issue during the previous meeting.

Vice Chair Wester stated that she found the proposal difficult to understand and stated that she could not identify a logical reason for altering ward boundaries. She reiterated that she remained open to hearing additional reasoning but personally supported striking the proposal.

Commissioner Reynolds asked a clarifying question regarding whether the proposal involved physically moving ward boundaries or simply creating more inclusive representation for residents within the designated areas.

Commissioner Mularski responded that the proposal involved redrawing the map. He stated that his concern centered on situations in which wards could contain equal populations but significantly different numbers of registered voters, potentially giving a smaller group of voters disproportionate influence. Commissioner Mularski stated that, without understanding how those changes would function, he viewed the proposal as uncertain.

Chair Barnhardt stated that the available data suggested that the shifts might not prove substantial, but he remained uncomfortable advancing

the proposal without understanding the full implications. He stated that the proposal carried potential electoral consequences and that he lacked sufficient information to feel comfortable advancing it into prioritization or recommending charter language.

Commissioner Maxwell stated that all residents already received representation within their wards regardless of voter registration status. He stated that representation should continue to function that way.

Commissioner Hill responded that representation depended on one's definition of the term. He explained that, although all residents lived within a ward, voting ultimately determined outcomes. He stated that non-voters could still experience decisions made by voters within the ward and believed that Councilmember Weaver's proposal sought to address that distinction in representation.

Vice Chair Wester responded that she viewed the issue differently. She explained that the current ward system relied on registered voter data and stated that the city did not use ward boundaries in day-to-day municipal operations or service delivery. She stated that wards primarily existed for election administration purposes. Vice Chair Wester acknowledged that she remained sensitive to issues of diversity and inclusion within Gahanna and considered those qualities among the city's greatest strengths. However, she stated that the proposal would shift ward boundaries based on population data derived from the six-year-old census, which concerned her. She reiterated that she did not believe the proposal would improve representation under the city's current governmental structure.

Commissioner Reynolds stated that she questioned whether the commission possessed enough information to strike the proposal outright. She expressed concern that the commission would never possess completely current population data because census data always lagged behind current conditions. Commissioner Reynolds suggested that the issue might warrant public consideration because some residents who could not vote might still view the matter as important. She stated that she could understand concerns raised during earlier discussion regarding neighbors and community members who lacked voting rights but still desired representation in local decisions. Commissioner Reynolds stated that she wanted additional time to

consider the proposal from those perspectives.

Vice Chair Wester reiterated that she still could not identify the practical purpose or benefit of the proposal.

Commissioner Reynolds responded that Councilmember Weaver had presented the issue as a community initiative intended to provide broader inclusion.

Vice Chair Wester stated that she still did not follow the reasoning behind the proposal. She reiterated that residents already had access to representation regardless of voter registration status and stated that ward boundaries did not affect the city's operational responsiveness. Vice Chair Wester stated that she still did not understand what problem the proposal sought to solve and reiterated her support for striking it.

Chair Barnhardt stated that, from a values perspective, he strongly supported the underlying representation argument because he believed residents should feel included in their community and electoral processes. However, he stated that the commission's responsibility extended beyond evaluating values and required careful consideration of operational impacts and implementation issues. Chair Barnhardt explained that the commission possessed access to staff resources and expertise that average voters did not. He stated that he lacked sufficient understanding of the proposal's tactical implications and therefore did not feel comfortable advancing it without additional information. Chair Barnhardt characterized that caution as responsible deliberation by the commission.

Commissioner Reynolds stated that she personally wanted additional time to review Councilmember Weaver's original materials and conduct further research.

Commissioner Belisle asked whether Commissioner Reynolds wanted the commission to table the matter until the following week so that members could continue reviewing it because the issue appeared contentious.

Vice Chair Wester responded that she believed the proposal remained appropriate for a vote to strike.

Chair Barnhardt stated that, because differing opinions remained and the commission had another special meeting scheduled for the following week, he would support tabling the matter for one week. He requested that staff conduct additional investigation into who drew the ward maps and what practical implications the proposed changes would create.

Vice Chair Wester stated that City Council handled ward boundaries.

Commissioner Mularski stated that the purpose of wards involved maintaining equal numbers of voters in each ward so that one ward would not overpower another through voter imbalance. He stated that, if the city maintained wards, they should continue to rely on voter numbers. Vice Chair Wester agreed.

Commissioner Maxwell stated that residents remained unregistered for many different reasons, including personal choice. He stated that voters ultimately made governmental decisions and acknowledged that some individuals unfortunately became overlooked in the process.

Commissioner Reynolds reiterated that she wanted to revisit Councilmember Weaver's original document and conduct additional review.

Chair Barnhardt stated that, based on the discussion, the commission might ultimately determine that the proposal warranted prioritization. Chair Barnhardt acknowledged the second and directed Clerk VanMeter to call the roll on the motion to strike CRC 025.

A motion was made by Wester, seconded by Maxwell, to strike CRC 025 (Article IV - Council: Ward Composition Apportionment Basis). The motion failed by the following vote:

Yes: 3 - Maxwell, Mularski and Wester

No: 4 - Barnhardt, Belisle, Hill and Reynolds

Chair Barnhardt stated that the motion to strike CRC 025 had failed by a vote of four no and three yes. He stated that the proposal would remain under consideration.

Vice Chair Wester stated that, as discussion continued, she wanted the commission to identify the specific problem the proposal sought to solve.

She stated that, once the commission identified the issue, members could seek data to support any proposed change. Vice Chair Wester further stated that she did not believe the charter review process existed to evaluate City Council's ability to represent residents.

Chair Barnhardt stated that the proposal had survived the educational threshold review and would therefore move into the prioritization phase, where the commission could continue discussion.

Commissioner Belisle stated that she could email President Weaver to ask whether he intended census data to determine population figures or whether he had another suggested methodology that he considered more accurate.

Scoring Mechanics Discussion

Chair Barnhardt then asked whether the commission had any remaining educational items requiring discussion. Hearing none, he proposed that the commission begin discussing the draft ballot measures individually and proceed through additional deliberation and scoring.

Commissioner Belisle asked whether commissioners would complete scoring individually during the meeting. Chair Barnhardt stated that he intended for the commission to proceed one proposal at a time, discuss each measure, and continue deliberation from the beginning of the list.

Before the commission began scoring discussion, Vice Chair Wester raised CRC 009 concerning the organizational meeting proposal submitted by Councilmember Bowers. She stated that she believed City Attorney Tamilarasan previously had explained that delaying the swearing-in of elected officials until as late as January 7 could create issues because the charter currently allowed flexibility through January 2. Vice Chair Wester stated that she understood the proposal could create complications if events requiring official action occurred before the swearing-in of the mayor, city attorney, or councilmembers because officials could not fulfill duties before taking the oath of office. She stated that she felt comfortable eliminating that proposal based on the information the commission already possessed.

Commissioner Belisle noted that Vice Chair Wester had moved backward in the process, similar to her own earlier motion.

Chair Barnhardt stated that the commission could address those details during deliberation on individual ballot measures. He explained that the commission could remove individual components from broader ballot measures while still scoring the remainder of the proposal.

Commissioner Belisle suggested that, because the commission had just begun deliberation, members should discuss all proposals before completing any scoring. She stated that commissioners might benefit from hearing all discussion and reflecting on the proposals before assigning scores.

Chair Barnhardt stated that he liked the suggestion and agreed that commissioners should have time to digest the discussions before completing scores.

Commissioner Belisle stated that she preferred additional time to think through the issues carefully rather than rushing to complete scoring during the meeting.

Chair Barnhardt stated that the eventual scoring votes would become part of the public record. He reminded commissioners that the following week's special meeting would require completion of scoring and prioritization. Chair Barnhardt also stated that commissioners unable to attend the next meeting would need to submit scores in advance so staff could incorporate them into the process and preserve them as part of the public record.

Commissioner Belisle suggested that all commissioners should submit scores electronically by the same deadline to avoid concerns about changes in scoring by those attending the meeting in person.

Chair Barnhardt stated that submitting all scores in advance also would improve administrative efficiency because Clerk VanMeter would not need to tally scores live during the meeting. He stated that aggregated scores would allow the commission to review priorities more effectively during deliberation.

Commissioner Hill asked Clerk VanMeter whether commissioners should submit scores by Monday at noon or another specific deadline.

Clerk VanMeter stated that Monday at noon would work well and noted that agenda materials for the special meeting needed public release at least 48 hours in advance.

Chair Barnhardt clarified that all commissioners should submit their scoring in advance. He stated that the commission needed to provide City Attorney Tamilarasan with sufficient information by the conclusion of the next Thursday meeting so she could begin drafting any recommended charter language. Chair Barnhardt instructed commissioners unable to attend the special meeting to submit all scores in advance and additionally provide their top five or six preferred proposals so those recommendations could inform deliberations.

Commissioner Belisle reiterated that simultaneous submission would help avoid concerns about commissioners influencing outcomes during the meeting itself. Chair Barnhardt agreed and again emphasized the administrative advantages of advance submission and score aggregation.

Commissioner Hill again confirmed the proposed submission deadline. Clerk VanMeter reiterated that Monday at noon would provide sufficient time to prepare materials.

Vice Chair Wester asked whether commissioners should organize submissions by category. Chair Barnhardt explained that commissioners should complete scorecards organized by draft ballot measure. He stated that the complete scorecards, rather than only aggregate scores, needed preservation as part of the public record because the scoring process constituted part of the commission's deliberative process.

Commissioner Belisle confirmed that commissioners would submit a PDF containing scores for all remaining ballot measures. Chair Barnhardt confirmed that understanding and offered to create fillable PDF scorecards for each measure. He stated that the forms would automatically total scores and promised to distribute them to commissioners the following day.

Commissioner Reynolds asked whether the commission would discuss the aggregated scores during the following Thursday meeting after submitting them by Monday at noon. Chair Barnhardt confirmed that the commission would review aggregated scores for all draft ballot measures during the special meeting. He stated that the commission would discuss which proposals scored highly or poorly and determine which recommendations to advance. He also reiterated that absent commissioners could submit written recommendations in advance for inclusion in deliberations.

Commissioner Belisle asked whether the commission planned to establish a minimum score threshold that would automatically eliminate proposals. Chair Barnhardt responded that low scores would indicate recommendations not to advance proposals at that time, but he emphasized that the scoring matrix would remain only a guide. He stated that the scoring process would help identify which proposals rose to the top as priorities for the commission. Chair Barnhardt then asked whether commissioners felt comfortable with the proposed process and reiterated the Monday noon submission deadline.

Commissioner Mularski stated that he already had completed his scoring and asked whether he needed to use the fillable PDF form afterward. Chair Barnhardt responded that Commissioner Mularski could simply provide his completed scoring materials to Clerk VanMeter at the end of the meeting. Chair Barnhardt reiterated that all other commissioners would submit their scorecards by Monday at noon and again stated that he would distribute fillable PDF forms for those who wished to use them.

Prioritization Discussion

Draft Ballot Measure One - (Article III - Mayor) An Amendment to Reform Gahanna's Non-Partisan Primary Election Process

Chair Barnhardt began discussion on the draft ballot measures by starting with Article Three, Mayor, Draft Ballot Measure One, which proposed an amendment to reform Gahanna's nonpartisan primary election process. He noted that Commissioner Mularski had submitted the proposal as CRC 001 and invited him to explain the rationale behind it.

Commissioner Mularski stated that the city previously faced a situation in which only two candidates filed for mayor, yet the city still conducted a primary election even though both candidates automatically advanced to the general election. He stated that the primary election cost the city more than \$300,000 and served little practical purpose because the outcome already had been determined. Commissioner Mularski stated that, if two or fewer candidates filed for mayor, both candidates should automatically advance to the general election without conducting a primary.

Chair Barnhardt asked whether the proposed language also aligned with provisions in the Ohio Revised Code regarding primary elections.

Commissioner Mularski confirmed that the language he submitted came directly from the Ohio Revised Code.

Chair Barnhardt stated that the proposed language therefore reflected a best-practice approach for handling such situations and observed that the current charter language did not align with that standard. Commissioner Mularski agreed. Chair Barnhardt then invited comments, suggestions, or concerns from the commission.

Vice Chair Wester stated that the proposal appeared straightforward and asked for clarification that, if more than two candidates filed for mayor, the city still would conduct a primary election. Chair Barnhardt confirmed that understanding. He further stated that the proposal made sense from both a cost-savings and efficiency perspective and aligned with recognized best practices. Chair Barnhardt added that he personally viewed it as a strong ballot measure.

Draft Ballot Measure Two - (Article III - Mayor) An Amendment to Require a Strategic Plan for the City of Gahanna and to Provide for Regular Review and Update

Chair Barnhardt continued discussion with Draft Ballot Measure Two under Article Three, Mayor, which proposed an amendment requiring a strategic plan for the City of Gahanna and providing for regular review and updates. He stated that the city administration had suggested the

proposal as a means of embedding strategic planning requirements into the mayor's executive duties while ensuring that City Council and the public would have a formal opportunity to review and comment on the city's long-term direction. Chair Barnhardt then opened the floor for discussion.

Commissioner Belisle stated that she had taken note of comments from individuals who expressed concern that integrating a strategic plan into the city charter could become overly restrictive. She stated that she initially agreed with Chair Barnhardt that carefully crafted language could avoid unnecessary limitations. However, after further consideration, Commissioner Belisle stated that, if the charter referenced a strategic plan at all, she preferred language that did not mandate the existence of a strategic plan. She suggested language stating that, if a strategic plan existed or had been implemented, the mayor would conduct an annual review or otherwise follow the plan. Commissioner Belisle stated that such wording would alleviate concerns about requiring the city to maintain a strategic plan at all times while still recognizing its importance. She further stated that the approach would preserve flexibility while demonstrating that Gahanna valued strategic planning.

Vice Chair Wester stated that she considered Commissioner Belisle's suggestion thoughtful and practical. She explained that she generally viewed the charter as a foundational document that should avoid mandating unnecessary or overly specific requirements. Vice Chair Wester stated that she supported language acknowledging a strategic plan if one existed because the city already devoted significant time and resources to strategic planning efforts. She further stated that she believed the charter could recognize the strategic plan as a guiding document without imposing inflexible requirements. Vice Chair Wester stated that she viewed the suggestion as a reasonable compromise that balanced flexibility with recognition of the strategic plan's importance.

Commissioner Belisle stated that she believed everyone respected the strategic plan itself and recognized its value to the city. She reiterated that her primary concern involved preserving flexibility and avoiding language that would unnecessarily restrict future decision-making.

Commissioner Reynolds stated that she shared concerns previously expressed by Ms. Pollyea, Councilmember Bowers, and Councilmember

Weaver that the issue could instead be addressed through ordinance. She stated that she hesitated to include such language in the charter itself. Commissioner Reynolds also referenced the commission's earlier discussion about saving public funds and questioned whether embedding strategic planning requirements into the charter might create additional expenses or limitations for the city. She stated that she wanted to ensure the charter avoided imposing unnecessary restrictions that City Council could otherwise address through ordinance.

Commissioner Belisle stated that those concerns originally motivated her earlier motion to strike the proposal because she questioned whether the matter properly fell within the commission's purview. However, after discussion, she stated that she now preferred maintaining flexibility within any potential charter language rather than eliminating the concept entirely.

Vice Chair Wester noted that the current charter already required a State of the City reporting mechanism and explained that the proposed amendment would add a broader strategic and long-term planning component.

Commissioner Hill referenced comments from Councilmember Schnetzer's earlier presentation, during which Councilmember Schnetzer cautioned against obligating the mayor through the charter without ensuring the resources necessary to fulfill those obligations. Commissioner Hill stated that he believed the commission generally agreed that the charter should avoid creating restrictive requirements.

Chair Barnhardt stated that he recognized his perspective differed somewhat from the group on the proposal. He stated that, based on his professional experience in local government, he considered strategic planning an important tool for operationalizing and institutionalizing long-term vision within a community. Chair Barnhardt stated that he did not believe Gahanna historically had embraced that type of long-term strategic approach. He explained that requiring a strategic plan would integrate long-term thinking into the city's organizational culture and decision-making processes. Chair Barnhardt further stated that he believed the administration's draft language already provided flexibility. He noted that City Council retained authority over appropriations and funding decisions, meaning that strategic planning would not

automatically create recurring large expenses. He explained that properly implemented strategic plans typically operated on five- to ten-year timelines and could adapt to changing circumstances as necessary. Chair Barnhardt referenced examples of communities updating strategic plans after the Intel development announcement in order to position themselves for economic opportunities. He stated that strategic planning encouraged continuity, annual conversations between the mayor and council, and ongoing review of community goals and implementation progress. Chair Barnhardt further stated that, based on his service on the steering committee for the “Our Gahanna” strategic plan, he viewed the proposal as a positive long-term investment in the city’s future.

Commissioner Reynolds acknowledged that she had participated in the strategic planning process and described it as valuable. However, she reiterated that she still believed the city could accomplish those goals through ordinance rather than through charter language.

Chair Barnhardt responded that embedding the concept in the charter elevated the importance of strategic planning and institutionalized the city’s commitment to maintaining a shared long-term vision.

Vice Chair Wester stated that she believed all commissioners had raised valid points and that she did not strongly disagree with anyone’s position. She observed that the charter functioned as a foundational governing document and stated that, in some respects, a strategic planning requirement made more sense in the charter than the existing State of the City reporting requirement. Vice Chair Wester also referenced earlier language suggestions circulated by Chair Barnhardt and asked whether commissioners would score the overall concept or specific proposed wording because the language itself could vary significantly.

Chair Barnhardt stated that he believed Director Vollmer had proposed revised language that provided additional flexibility and reduced prescriptive timelines. He stated that annual reporting requirements naturally would encourage ongoing discussion and updates as needed.

Commissioner Belisle clarified that her question concerned whether commissioners would score the broad concept itself or evaluate the specific wording currently under discussion. Chair Barnhardt responded

that his understanding of the process involved the City Attorney drafting language based on the tenor of the commission's discussions and recommendations. He stated that, if the proposal advanced, draft language would return to the commission for further review and refinement. Commissioner Belisle confirmed that commissioners therefore would score the overall concept rather than specific charter wording. Chair Barnhardt agreed and stated that the commission had not yet reached the stage of drafting precise code language.

Commissioner Maxwell summarized the discussion by stating that commissioners effectively would score whether the city should maintain a strategic planning requirement without specifying exact timelines or procedures. Chair Barnhardt confirmed that understanding.

Commissioner Maxwell stated that wording would remain critically important for this proposal. Chair Barnhardt agreed and stated that the City Attorney's office likely would incorporate the commission's discussions and multiple draft language suggestions into any future proposal language.

Commissioner Belisle stated that she could envision future charter review commissions questioning why such language appeared in the charter decades later, particularly if terminology or planning practices evolved over time. Chair Barnhardt responded humorously that he expected to remain available in 25 years if future commissions wished to contact him about the matter. Commissioner Belisle reiterated that future generations might ultimately decide to remove such language from the charter.

Chair Barnhardt acknowledged that every community approached governance differently and stated that such a proposal might not work everywhere. However, he reiterated that he believed the proposal would benefit Gahanna and align with the direction the city sought to pursue organizationally and strategically.

Commissioner Hill stated that he wanted to build upon Commissioner Belisle's comments and revisit Vice Chair Wester's earlier analytical framework by asking what specific problem the commission sought to solve through charter language rather than through ordinary governmental action. He clarified that he did not oppose strategic planning itself but wanted the commission to consider carefully whether the charter

represented the appropriate vehicle for the requirement. Chair Barnhardt thanked Commissioner Hill for raising that perspective and stated that the commission should continue using that lens throughout deliberations and scoring discussions. He stated that identifying the problems the commission sought to solve represented an important part of thoughtful deliberation.

Draft Ballot Measure Three - (Article III - Mayor) An Amendment to Align Residency and Conflict of Interest Requirements Across Elected Offices

Chair Barnhardt moved discussion to Draft Ballot Measure Three, an amendment to align residency and conflict-of-interest requirements across elected offices. He clarified that the proposal combined CRC 002, CRC 003, and CRC 026 and acknowledged that the organization of the materials caused some confusion.

Commissioner Belisle stated that no other nearby city imposed a prior residency duration requirement on elected city attorneys. She clarified that other communities required residency at the time of filing and throughout the term of office, but Gahanna remained the only city with an extended residency requirement before filing. Commissioner Belisle stated that Gahanna therefore represented a significant outlier in that regard.

Vice Chair Wester responded that many surrounding communities appointed or hired city attorneys rather than electing them. She questioned whether Reynoldsburg maintained a residency requirement for its elected city attorney but stated that she could not recall the exact details.

Chair Barnhardt stated that his research into approximately ten communities showed that Reynoldsburg and Whitehall both elected city attorneys and neither city imposed a prior residency duration requirement. He stated that Gahanna appeared to be the only community with that requirement.

Commissioner Belisle clarified that she referred specifically to a required period of residency before filing for office rather than residency during the

term itself.

Vice Chair Wester stated that, if the commission retained an elected city attorney, she believed all three elected offices should maintain consistent residency requirements. She stated that the mayor currently faced a two-year residency requirement while City Council members faced a shorter requirement and city attorneys only needed to qualify as electors at the time of filing. Vice Chair Wester also referenced political appointment language and other inconsistent provisions within the city attorney section and stated that the commission should streamline those provisions to match the mayoral and council sections.

Chair Barnhardt stated that the intent of the proposal involved removing political language and creating consistency across the elected offices.

Vice Chair Wester explained that she personally preferred a two-year residency requirement for all elected offices because she believed elected officials should possess strong familiarity with the community. She stated that many residents had lived in Gahanna for decades and that a two-year requirement represented a minimal threshold. Vice Chair Wester added that, if the commission viewed residency requirements as a deterrent for qualified candidates, she preferred moving toward an appointed or hired city attorney because appointment would eliminate the need for residency restrictions.

Chair Barnhardt stated that he would like additional insight regarding why the city attorney position might require different standards than the mayor or council positions. He invited Assistant City Attorney Roth or City Attorney Tamarasan to provide additional rationale in the future if necessary.

Commissioner Mularski asked what specific problem the commission sought to solve by changing the existing residency requirements. He questioned why the commission needed to alter the differences between the two-year requirement for mayor and the shorter requirement for councilmembers. Vice Chair Wester responded that she viewed consistency itself as the primary objective. She stated that the current charter established three separate residency standards for the three elected offices and characterized that inconsistency as unusual.

Chair Barnhardt asked whether the current 15-month residency requirement for council had originated during the previous charter review process. Vice Chair Wester confirmed that understanding. Chair Barnhardt stated that, because voters previously approved the 15-month requirement for council, he viewed that standard as a logical baseline if the commission sought consistency between offices. He stated that he still wanted additional information regarding why the city attorney position differed but believed standardization based on prior voter-approved language made sense. Commissioner Mularski jokingly stated that attorneys wrote the rules, which explained the differences.

Vice Chair Wester clarified that the 15-month requirement effectively represented one year before the filing deadline plus the additional time before the election. She stated that most residents did not think in terms of filing deadlines, but she reiterated that the current system still created inconsistent standards across elected offices.

Commissioner Belisle disagreed with Vice Chair Wester's position and stated that, if the commission sought consistency, she preferred reducing the residency requirement rather than increasing it. She referenced comments from President Weaver, who stated that individuals who built enough community support to win office within a shorter residency period likely had earned the trust of residents. Commissioner Belisle stated that successful candidates still would need to perform grassroots work and establish meaningful community involvement within that timeframe.

Chair Barnhardt agreed that candidates would still need to build support and become invested in the community even within a 15-month residency period.

Commissioner Reynolds noted that the commission previously discussed the city attorney role as a unique and difficult position to fill. She stated that adding stricter residency requirements for city attorney could unnecessarily limit the available pool of qualified candidates.

Chair Barnhardt stated that he still needed additional information regarding why the city attorney position should differ from the mayoral and council positions. He stated that the commission either should standardize all three offices or establish a clear rationale for treating the city attorney differently.

Commissioner Belisle stated that the city attorney position remained part-time and reiterated that the proposal to remove residency requirements or potentially move toward an appointed city attorney arose from a desire to increase the pool of qualified candidates. She stated that the city should avoid situations in which the city selected candidates merely because they met residency requirements rather than because they possessed strong legal qualifications. Commissioner Belisle further noted that an appointed city attorney would fall outside the consistency discussion entirely because appointment would eliminate elected office requirements.

Vice Chair Wester clarified that her personal preference involved moving to an appointed or hired city attorney because she believed the position required significant legal expertise and collaboration between the mayor and council. She stated that appointed positions would reduce concerns about elections, partisanship, and residency while increasing the pool of qualified candidates. However, Vice Chair Wester stated that, if the commission retained elected city attorneys, she still believed residency qualifications should remain consistent across all elected offices.

Commissioner Belisle stated that no nearby city imposed prior residency duration requirements on elected city attorneys and suggested that those communities prioritized qualifications and broader candidate pools over strict residency standards. Vice Chair Wester responded that she still viewed consistency among elected offices as the best approach if the city retained elected city attorneys. She stated that she did not believe the residency requirement represented the primary obstacle to attracting qualified candidates and reiterated that consistency across all three elected offices remained her main objective.

Chair Barnhardt stated that the commission should continue the city attorney discussion at the following meeting when City Attorney Tamilarasan returned with additional information.

Assistant City Attorney Matt Roth then addressed the commission. He stated that he had served as assistant city attorney in all three Franklin County suburbs that elected city attorneys. He explained that the pool of candidates for city attorney already remained much smaller because candidates first had to qualify as licensed attorneys in Ohio. Assistant

City Attorney Roth noted that Gahanna possessed a relatively large number of attorneys compared to Whitehall, which historically struggled to identify qualified candidates. He referenced a former Reynoldsburg city attorney who moved into the city shortly before appointment and later served successfully for many years. Assistant City Attorney Roth stated that those practical considerations likely explained why many cities did not impose extended residency requirements on city attorneys, although he also expressed support for consistency where appropriate.

Commissioner Belisle referenced concerns raised by an audience member regarding the city's ability to quickly replace a city attorney in the event of a vacancy or emergency. She asked whether Gahanna's relatively large attorney population provided enough flexibility to maintain a strong candidate pool. Assistant City Attorney Roth responded that Gahanna included many attorneys and judges and therefore possessed a substantial pool of qualified individuals.

Commissioner Mularski reiterated that requiring candidates to hold legal credentials already significantly narrowed the field of eligible candidates for city attorney.

Chair Barnhardt summarized the discussion by stating that, although Gahanna might possess more attorneys than neighboring communities, the city attorney pool still remained far smaller than the candidate pools for mayor or council. He stated that reducing residency restrictions could improve the city's ability to attract highly qualified candidates for the office.

Commissioner Belisle stated that she still believed the mayor should maintain deeper roots within the community than city council members because council members might represent more transient wards. She stated that she preferred maintaining additional flexibility for council residency requirements and expressed support for the current structure.

Vice Chair Wester responded that she considered the issue relatively noncontroversial until that evening's discussion. She reiterated that she viewed consistency among elected office qualifications as the primary goal of the proposal. She also noted that additional city attorney reforms remained under consideration separately from the residency discussion.

Chair Barnhardt stated that he appreciated the discussion because it challenged some of his own preconceived views. He stated that listening to the perspectives and reasoning of other commissioners contributed to a strong deliberative process and thanked the commission for the thoughtful conversation.

Commissioner Maxwell stated that he appreciated Vice Chair Wester's argument for consistency but questioned what actual problem the proposal sought to solve. He also noted that voters previously approved the 15-month council residency requirement and stated that he did not see a strong reason to change it. Chair Barnhardt agreed that the commission should not change provisions simply because it possessed the authority to do so.

Vice Chair Wester stated that she would support a 15-month residency requirement for all three elected offices if the commission preferred that approach. She reiterated that the proposal's broader purpose involved standardizing residency qualifications, conflict prohibitions, and disqualification standards across all elected offices.

Draft Ballot Measure Four - (Article III - Mayor) An Amendment to Adopt a Council-Manager Form of Government for the City of Gahanna.

[Note: The Commission struck the Draft Ballot Measure Four (CRC 027) proposal from further consideration].

Draft Ballot Measure Five - (Article IV - Council) An Amendment to Provide for Modernizing City Council Processes and Procedures

Chair Barnhardt moved discussion to Draft Ballot Measure Five, which combined CRC 005, CRC 012, CRC 009, CRC 011, and CRC 021 into a proposal to modernize City Council processes and procedures. He explained that the proposal addressed public notice modernization requirements, scheduling changes, organizational meeting timing, and due process framework provisions. Chair Barnhardt described the proposal as a more detailed procedural and cleanup measure and opened discussion.

Vice Chair Wester stated that the current charter already addressed

public notice requirements and questioned whether the commission needed to modernize the language. She explained that the charter currently required conspicuous physical posting of notices and stated that Councilmember Bowers appeared to propose updating the language to reflect modern communication practices. Vice Chair Wester further noted that the mayor previously stated that the city already communicated public notices through numerous methods, including social media and the city website. She questioned what specific problem the commission sought to solve through charter amendments because the city already utilized modern communication methods in practice.

Commissioner Reynolds stated that she personally appreciated physical public postings and referenced her own experience seeing notices at City Hall while registering her children for summer camp. She stated that she valued physical forms of communication while also recognizing that many residents relied on digital platforms. Commissioner Reynolds acknowledged that future communication practices could continue evolving and stated that she remained uncertain about the best legal language for balancing traditional and modern notice methods.

Commissioner Belisle stated that the commission previously discussed preserving the existing conspicuous physical posting requirement while updating the charter language to acknowledge modern communication practices as additional methods rather than replacements.

Chair Barnhardt stated that the commission might not even need to specifically reference modern communication methods if the language instead created flexibility for future communication practices. He stated that he appreciated the public notice board located at City Hall and viewed it as a valuable form of communication. Chair Barnhardt also noted that the city already used internet-based communication extensively and suggested that any changes likely should focus on making the charter language less restrictive rather than replacing physical notice requirements.

Commissioner Mularski stated that the existing language only established minimum notice requirements and did not prevent the city from utilizing additional communication methods.

Chair Barnhardt agreed and stated that the existing charter language

might already function as a minimum standard while still allowing the city to exceed those requirements through additional outreach. He further observed that public expectations naturally encouraged the city to provide broader communication methods.

Vice Chair Wester stated that the current language did not appear harmful and reiterated that no commissioner seemed interested in eliminating physical posting requirements. She observed that highly specific charter language sometimes encouraged unnecessary scrutiny even when city operations already exceeded those requirements.

Commissioner Mularski cautioned the commission against contributing to ballot fatigue by placing minor procedural issues before voters unnecessarily.

Commissioner Maxwell stated that he personally preferred leaving the current notice language unchanged because the city already possessed authority to exceed the minimum requirements.

Chair Barnhardt agreed that older charter language did not necessarily create problems simply because it reflected earlier communication methods. He then transitioned discussion to the proposal concerning organizational meeting scheduling. Chair Barnhardt stated that the commission previously raised concerns regarding shifting the organizational meeting anchor date because doing so could create situations in which a newly elected mayor had not yet officially taken office before important executive actions became necessary. He stated that the possibility concerned him.

Vice Chair Wester stated that she would not support that proposal because City Attorney Tamilarasan previously confirmed that it could create uncertainty regarding the transition of authority. Vice Chair Wester stated that unexpected situations often arose within municipal government and that she did not want to create legal ambiguity regarding executive authority.

Chair Barnhardt stated that he initially considered the proposal straightforward because it appeared to provide flexibility. However, after discussing unintended consequences, he became concerned that delayed swearing-in dates could create situations in which no mayor

officially possessed executive authority. Chair Barnhardt stated that he personally did not want to risk creating that situation.

Commissioner Belisle noted that City Attorney Tamilarasan previously explained that officials could take their oaths of office at any time and not necessarily during the organizational meeting itself. However, Commissioner Belisle stated that she increasingly focused on what additional charter revisions the city might need to avoid unintended consequences from the scheduling changes. She stated that the city potentially would need to amend provisions regarding terms of office and continuity of authority to create sufficient safeguards. Commissioner Belisle stated that she remained undecided on the proposal and intended to continue reviewing it during prioritization.

Vice Chair Wester stated that she also valued the ceremonial and community aspects of organizational meetings. She described those meetings as meaningful occasions during which newly elected officials took office together and the city celebrated new beginnings. Vice Chair Wester stated that the city gained little practical benefit from additional scheduling flexibility because organizational meetings occurred only once each year. She stated that preserving the current structure avoided unnecessary legal complications.

Chair Barnhardt then addressed the remaining portions of the draft ballot measure concerning Robert's Rules cleanup language and abstention procedures. He stated that he did not feel strongly about either proposal but considered them reasonable cleanup measures.

Vice Chair Wester referenced the charter language governing abstentions and described it as unusually dramatic. She explained that the current provision required councilmembers to explicitly state the basis for a conflict of interest when abstaining from votes and included language suggesting that failure to do so could result in a vacancy of office. Vice Chair Wester stated that the language appeared highly specific and severe, although she acknowledged uncertainty regarding what language represented best practice. She asked whether the abstention provision originated from Councilmember Bowers or Councilmember Schnetzer and concluded that it appeared to come from Councilmember Schnetzer.

Chair Barnhardt stated that the proposal likely represented a reasonable cleanup effort but questioned whether the issue had ever created practical problems.

Vice Chair Wester noted that councilmembers occasionally abstained from votes but stated that she did not know whether any official previously failed to provide a reason for abstention in the manner described by the charter language.

Commissioner Mularski stated that he had not observed such an issue during his 63 years living in Gahanna. Vice Chair Wester joked that Commissioner Mularski therefore clearly satisfied the residency requirements.

Chair Barnhardt then asked whether commissioners had any additional comments on Draft Ballot Measure Five. Hearing none, he moved discussion to the next item.

Draft Ballot Measure Six - (Article IV - Council) An Amendment to Adopt Resident-Population Ward Apportionment Language

Chair Barnhardt returned discussion to Draft Ballot Measure Six concerning ward composition and apportionment based on resident population language. He asked whether any commissioners had additional comments regarding the proposal. Hearing no further discussion, Chair Barnhardt stated that the commission would continue moving forward with its work.

Draft Ballot Measure Seven - (Article IV - Council) An Amendment to Establish Term Limits for Council Leadership and Align Voting Procedure

Chair Barnhardt moved discussion to Draft Ballot Measure Seven, an amendment to establish term limits for council leadership and align voting procedures. He explained that the proposal would authorize two-year terms for the council president and vice president positions in order to provide continuity in leadership roles that supervised the Clerk of Council and carried significant administrative responsibilities. Chair Barnhardt then opened the floor for discussion.

Vice Chair Wester stated that she held strong opinions regarding the proposal and questioned why City Council wanted to make the change. She explained that the current charter language already allowed council to elect a president and vice president for any duration, including one year, two years, or longer. Vice Chair Wester stated that the only practical change created by the proposal would involve eliminating annual leadership elections during the organizational meeting. She stated that she valued the organizational meeting because it allowed council to reset leadership annually and created accountability among council members. Vice Chair Wester also noted that governing bodies sometimes experienced divisions and that annual elections provided an opportunity for feedback and accountability. Vice Chair Wester further stated that Councilmember Bowers previously explained that recent practice involved electing presidents to two-year terms. However, Vice Chair Wester recalled that, prior to 2022, the presidency changed more frequently, with leadership terms varying from one year to multiple years. She stated that the recent two-year practice represented a trend rather than a requirement and emphasized that the current charter already allowed council to continue that practice voluntarily. Vice Chair Wester stated that she opposed changing the charter because she preferred preserving annual accountability through leadership elections.

Commissioner Mularski stated that he opposed creating more restrictive charter language and viewed the proposal as unnecessarily limiting council's flexibility.

Commissioner Belisle agreed with Vice Chair Wester's comments and stated that, although Councilmember Bowers might correctly identify a current best practice, the charter should not dictate best practices. Commissioner Belisle stated that preserving flexibility represented the better approach. Vice Chair Wester stated that Commissioner Belisle summarized the issue well.

Chair Barnhardt stated that any requirements regarding council president or vice president term lengths likely belonged in council rules rather than in the charter itself. He stated that, if the commission advanced anything related to the proposal, he would prefer removing the charter prescription entirely and allowing council to establish its own internal rules. However, Chair Barnhardt also stated that he did not feel strongly enough about the

issue to support placing it on the ballot.

Vice Chair Wester stated that she preferred one-year terms because City Council also made several other annual appointments, including appointments to MORPC, school district liaison roles, and Visit Gahanna. She stated that annual leadership elections allowed council to provide feedback and evaluate leadership performance regularly. Vice Chair Wester also referenced comments from President Weaver and Councilmember Bowers that the leadership positions involved significant responsibilities and acknowledged that circumstances could change for councilmembers during their terms. She reiterated that the current charter language already provided maximum flexibility.

Chair Barnhardt stated that, when uncertain, he generally preferred leaving existing charter language unchanged.

Draft Ballot Measure Eight - (Article IV - Council) An Amendment to Modernize Special Meeting Requirements

Chair Barnhardt moved discussion to Draft Ballot Measure Eight, an amendment to modernize special meeting notice requirements. He explained that the proposal would add the city attorney to the list of officials authorized to request a special meeting and would update notice language to reflect current communication practices. Chair Barnhardt then opened the floor for discussion and noted that the proposal corresponded to CRC 010.

Commissioner Belisle stated that she generally supported the proposal.

Vice Chair Wester asked Assistant City Attorney Roth whether Gahanna represented an outlier by not allowing the city attorney to call a special meeting. She questioned why the charter omitted the city attorney from that authority. Assistant City Attorney Roth responded that he believed the city attorney should likely possess that authority but stated that he did not know how Gahanna compared to other communities.

Chair Barnhardt asked whether situations previously arose in which the city attorney needed to call a special meeting for matters such as

economic development but lacked the authority to do so directly. Assistant City Attorney Roth stated that, in practice, when such situations occurred, the city attorney simply contacted a member of council who then made the request for the special meeting.

Commissioner Mularski stated that, to his knowledge, the issue had never caused a problem. He explained that the council president, the mayor, and a majority of council members all already possessed authority to call special meetings. Commissioner Mularski stated that, if all those parties refused to call a meeting, then council likely did not want the meeting held because the meeting ultimately belonged to council rather than to the city attorney.

Chair Barnhardt responded that, if the city attorney believed a special meeting became necessary, council leadership or the mayor likely would cooperate and call the meeting.

Commissioner Belisle stated that many of the commission's discussions regarding the city attorney interconnected with the larger conversation about whether the city attorney should remain elected or become appointed. She stated that, if the city retained an elected city attorney, then granting authority to call a special meeting appeared straightforward. However, she suggested that the issue might require additional consideration if the city attorney became an appointed position.

Vice Chair Wester responded that she believed the authority likely should apply regardless of whether the city attorney remained elected or became appointed. She stated that the proposal appeared to recognize the importance of the city attorney role and questioned why the charter omitted that authority. Vice Chair Wester also agreed that the issue interconnected with the broader city attorney discussion scheduled for the following week.

Commissioner Belisle stated that she did not believe extending that authority to the city attorney would create harm but reiterated that the proposal remained intertwined with the larger city attorney discussion.

Chair Barnhardt stated that the commission could continue discussing the issue during the following week's meeting. He then moved the

commission to the next item of business.

Draft Ballot Measure Nine - (Article IV - Council) An Amendment to Strengthen Council Oversight of Real Property, Contracts, and Development Agreements

[Note: The Commission struck the Draft Ballot Measure Nine (CRC 013, 014, 015, 016) proposal from further consideration].

Draft Ballot Measure Ten - (Article V - Administrative Departments) An Amendment to Restructure the Article V Enumeration of Administrative Departments

Chair Barnhardt moved discussion to Article Five, Administrative Departments, Draft Ballot Measure Ten, an amendment to restructure the Article Five enumeration of administrative departments. He explained that the proposal sought to resolve an internal conflict created by a previous charter review commission ballot measure that granted the mayor authority to reorganize departments while the charter still listed required departments by name. Chair Barnhardt stated that the proposal would remove the enumerated department list from the charter while retaining certain higher-level qualifications and requirements, including provisions related to the Director of Finance and public safety functions. He then opened the floor for discussion.

Vice Chair Wester asked for clarification regarding the proposal and stated that she understood it would remove all department names from the charter. She also recalled discussion suggesting that replacement language would instead describe general city administrative functions rather than specific departments. Vice Chair Wester stated that she did not recall the exact draft language but believed either Director Vollmer or the mayor previously referenced such language. She further stated that, for scoring purposes, commissioners effectively would determine whether they agreed with removing the specific department names from the charter.

Chair Barnhardt explained that the previous charter review commission already granted the mayor authority to organize, create, remove, or restructure departments. However, he stated that the charter still retained

prescriptive language listing required departments such as Public Service and Engineering, Parks and Recreation, and Human Resources. Chair Barnhardt explained that the proposal therefore would remove those specific department listings while preserving provisions related to key functions and qualifications, including requirements for the Director of Finance and the maintenance of public safety divisions such as police and fire. Chair Barnhardt referenced draft language stating that department directors would continue to require expertise and administrative qualifications relevant to their duties. He also noted that the charter would continue requiring the Director of Finance, appointed by the mayor, to serve as the city's chief financial officer and fulfill all duties required under Ohio law and the charter, including maintaining complete information regarding the city's financial affairs. Chair Barnhardt summarized the proposal as a continuation of the authority voters already approved in 2021 by granting the mayor administrative reorganization powers. He stated that the amendment would complete the cleanup process by removing contradictory charter language. Chair Barnhardt further stated that the proposal made sense to him because the charter currently created inconsistency by granting flexibility while simultaneously prescribing fixed departments. Hearing no additional discussion, Chair Barnhardt moved the commission to the next item.

Draft Ballot Measure Eleven - (Article XI - Planning Commission) An Amendment to Reform Planning Commission Attendance, Removal, and Member Accountability Standards

Chair Barnhardt moved discussion to Draft Ballot Measure Eleven concerning the Planning Commission. He explained that the proposal involved amendments related to Planning Commission attendance, removal procedures, and member accountability standards. Chair Barnhardt noted that the commission previously struck one component of the proposal and stated that the remaining items addressed attendance thresholds, elimination of automatic removals, and revisions to the definition of just cause for removal. He then opened the floor for discussion.

Vice Chair Wester stated that she believed the proposal largely involved cleanup language. Commissioner Reynolds responded that she understood the proposal as an effort to clarify authority and procedures

because earlier language did not clearly define responsibility for certain actions.

Vice Chair Wester stated that the charter currently established a fixed number of absences that could trigger removal from the Planning Commission. She explained that the cadence of Planning Commission meetings had changed over time, which altered the practical effect of those absence limits. Vice Chair Wester stated that the proposal suggested using percentages rather than fixed numerical thresholds. She further stated that she strongly opposed including such detailed attendance rules in the charter and believed the commission itself should establish attendance and excused absence rules internally.

Chair Barnhardt stated that Director Blackford previously emailed suggested draft charter revisions that generally delegated attendance rules and procedures to the Planning Commission itself. He agreed that the charter should avoid highly prescriptive language in that area.

Assistant City Attorney Roth then addressed the commission and stated that, during the previous year, the city nearly removed a Planning Commission member because the member's employment required extensive travel. Assistant City Attorney Roth stated that the member remained highly effective and committed to the commission but could not consistently attend meetings because of work obligations. He explained that the city informed the member that the charter language left no flexibility because the attendance rules appeared explicitly in writing. Assistant City Attorney Roth stated that the rigid "if this, then that" structure created unnecessary problems and supported removing that level of specificity from the charter.

Chair Barnhardt agreed and stated that the highly prescriptive language failed to provide flexibility as meeting schedules and circumstances changed over time.

Commissioner Maxwell clarified that the proposal primarily involved removing restrictive charter language and allowing the commission itself to establish attendance procedures. He stated that the explanation made sense to him because such rules belonged at the commission level rather than in the charter.

Vice Chair Wester added that recent Planning Commission members experienced serious health challenges and noted that former member Bobbie Burba had passed away several years earlier. Vice Chair Wester stated that commission composition and personal circumstances could vary significantly over time and that overly specific charter language created difficulties when the city attempted to accommodate those circumstances through scheduling adjustments.

Commissioner Maxwell reiterated that removing the charter language would allow the Planning Commission to establish its own attendance and procedural rules. Chair Barnhardt agreed and stated that, if the proposal advanced, the draft language likely would remove the existing provisions and delegate authority to the commission itself.

Commissioner Belisle then addressed CRC 020 concerning the proposal to define “just cause” for removal. She stated that she hesitated to define the phrase because “just cause” represented a commonly understood legal term intended to remain broad and flexible.

Commissioner Belisle stated that she opposed defining the term in the charter but did support requiring notice and an opportunity to respond before removal. Vice Chair Wester agreed with Commissioner Belisle’s position.

Commissioner Maxwell asked for clarification because the proposal contained several distinct components related to removal procedures. He wanted to confirm that commissioners could support some portions of the proposal while rejecting others.

Chair Barnhardt responded that the draft language provided a definition of “just cause,” including attendance issues, failure to perform duties, violations of law or ethics requirements, or conduct interfering with commission operations. He also noted that the draft language required notice and an opportunity for the member to respond before removal.

Commissioner Mularski clarified that commissioners therefore could support CRC 017 and CRC 018 while opposing CRC 020. Chair Barnhardt confirmed that understanding. Commissioner Maxwell stated that the clarification answered his question.

Commissioner Belisle asked whether commissioners would prioritize

and score each individual component separately rather than treating the proposal as a single package. Chair Barnhardt explained that the commission ultimately could provide drafting direction indicating that certain portions should not appear in the final language. He stated that the tenor of the commission's discussion would guide the drafting process and noted that the commission appeared to share consensus against including a detailed definition of "just cause."

Vice Chair Wester stated that the previous discussion concerning department titles illustrated the risks of overly specific charter language. She explained that language that once appeared beneficial later created unintended complications requiring removal. Vice Chair Wester stated that she viewed the Planning Commission proposal similarly and preferred avoiding excessive specificity in all three remaining portions of the measure. She also confirmed her understanding that commissioners would score the concepts individually and later decide which portions to retain or discard during drafting.

Chair Barnhardt explained that, if Draft Ballot Measure Eleven ranked highly during prioritization, the commission then could specify that the priority involved removing overly prescriptive attendance language while excluding the proposed "just cause" definition. He stated that the commission's direction would guide how staff drafted any proposed charter amendments.

Commissioner Hill asked whether commissioners needed to submit written comments or rationale for each proposal when submitting scores. Chair Barnhardt responded that commissioners only needed to submit their individual scores by the Monday noon deadline. However, he stated that commissioners could include narrative explanations for their top five proposals if they wished to provide additional context regarding their priorities. Chair Barnhardt clarified that commissioners did not need to provide written explanations for every proposal unless they wanted to do so.

Chair Barnhardt then asked whether the commission felt comfortable moving forward with the proposal discussion. Hearing no additional comments, he moved to the next item.

Draft Ballot Measure Twelve - (Article XII - Board of Zoning and

Building Appeals) An Amendment to Repeal the Board of Zoning and Building Appeals and Transfer Its Authority

Chair Barnhardt moved discussion to Draft Ballot Measure Twelve concerning the Board of Zoning and Building Appeals. He explained that the proposal would repeal the Board of Zoning and Building Appeals and transfer its appeals authority to the Planning Commission. Chair Barnhardt stated that staff indicated the Board of Zoning and Building Appeals experienced a significant decline in caseload and met too infrequently to maintain the expertise necessary to effectively perform its duties. He further stated that the board had become largely dormant.

Vice Chair Wester stated that she considered the proposal another straightforward measure. She noted that Director Blackford previously explained that most cities already handled those functions through their planning commissions.

Commissioner Maxwell agreed that the proposal appeared straightforward but stated that the public would need clear explanation because residents might mistakenly believe the city eliminated their right to appeal decisions.

Vice Chair Wester agreed and stated that Commissioner Maxwell raised an important point regarding public understanding of the proposal.

Commissioner Reynolds noted that the Board of Zoning and Building Appeals also represented a community participation opportunity. However, she acknowledged that voters ultimately could decide whether they supported the change.

Vice Chair Wester clarified that the proposal would not eliminate appeal rights themselves but instead would transfer the process to the Planning Commission.

Assistant City Attorney Roth explained that the Board of Zoning and Building Appeals met only about once per year on average. He stated that many charters historically created such boards as additional layers of due process, allowing appeals from administrative decisions to proceed from the Planning Commission to the Board of Zoning and

Building Appeals. However, Assistant City Attorney Roth stated that the process often resulted in different city entities effectively litigating against one another despite all representing the City of Gahanna. He referenced an earlier situation involving himself and Commissioner Mularski in which one represented the Planning Commission and the other represented the Board of Zoning and Building Appeals in the same matter. Assistant City Attorney Roth stated that the arrangement seemed unnecessary and inefficient because state law already provided judicial appeal procedures through the courts.

Commissioner Reynolds noted that the Board of Zoning and Building Appeals also involved compensated positions and compared the proposal to earlier discussions regarding unnecessary governmental expenses.

Commissioner Hill asked whether removing the Board of Zoning and Building Appeals would require corresponding revisions throughout the charter wherever the board currently appeared. Assistant City Attorney Roth confirmed that any references to the board elsewhere in the charter would require revision or removal. Commissioner Hill observed that the current documentation did not identify all affected references.

Commissioner Mularski agreed that the city would need to address all such references because otherwise the charter would continue referencing a board that no longer existed.

Commissioner Reynolds asked whether the city instead could update existing references to identify the Planning Commission rather than the Board of Zoning and Building Appeals. Commissioner Hill responded that the current language specifically referenced the Board of Zoning and Building Appeals as a distinct entity and therefore would require direct revision to refer specifically to the Planning Commission.

Chair Barnhardt stated that he also identified several references to the Board of Zoning and Building Appeals in other sections of the charter. He stated that the proposal would require additional cleanup revisions to eliminate any remaining references after the board's removal.

Draft Ballot Measure Thirteen - (Article XXII - Charter Review

Commission) An Amendment to Revise the Frequency and Scope of Mandatory Charter Review

Chair Barnhardt moved discussion to Draft Ballot Measure Thirteen, concerning CRC 022 and CRC 023 related to the Charter Review Commission's convening frequency and scope. He explained that the proposal sought to amend the mandatory five-year convening cycle for charter review by either extending the interval, eliminating the automatic trigger, or requiring council to establish a targeted scope for future charter review commissions. Chair Barnhardt stated that the issue felt particularly relevant to the current commission and opened the floor for discussion.

Commissioner Belisle immediately stated her support for moving to a ten-year review cycle.

Commissioner Mularski agreed and stated that five years occurred too frequently.

Commissioner Belisle stated that she struggled with the issue but ultimately supported a ten-year cycle because other mechanisms already existed for addressing charter amendments outside the regular review process. She stated that people often enjoyed proposing changes simply because they possessed the ability to do so. Commissioner Belisle also joked that ten years represented enough time for future residents to decide they wanted to remove the strategic plan language from the charter.

Chair Barnhardt referenced comments from Councilmember Schnetzer's presentation regarding the city charter as a local constitution. He observed that the Gahanna Charter had undergone many amendments compared to the relatively limited number of amendments to the United States Constitution over more than 200 years. Vice Chair Wester noted that the city charter contained approximately 88 amendments compared to 27 amendments to the United States Constitution. Chair Barnhardt stated that the charter represented the city's foundational governing document and that amendments should not occur lightly. He stated that ten-year review cycles appeared very common among other communities and noted that colleagues serving on charter review

commissions elsewhere expressed surprise that Gahanna conducted reviews every five years. Chair Barnhardt stated that ten years represented a widely accepted standard and that he supported the change.

Commissioner Belisle stated that long-term residents likely would remember frequent charter amendments and question why the city repeatedly changed foundational provisions.

Vice Chair Wester stated that she also supported a ten-year cycle. She explained that the current charter automatically required review every five years without requiring any specific scope or purpose. Vice Chair Wester stated that such automatic reviews created temptation to propose changes simply because the opportunity existed. She stated that charter changes should remain strategic and foundational rather than routine. Vice Chair Wester further stated that ten years appeared to represent the most common review interval among communities. Chair Barnhardt confirmed that ten years represented the prevailing standard among communities familiar to him.

Commissioner Maxwell jokingly noted that a ten-year cycle might effectively require commissioners themselves to serve ten-year terms.

Commissioner Hill referenced Section 22.01 concerning the composition and term of the Charter Review Commission and indicated that the charter language governing commissioner terms likely also would require revision.

Chair Barnhardt stated that he would like to review how other charters handled commissioner terms under ten-year review cycles. He jokingly stated that, while he personally might enjoy a ten-year term serving Gahanna, he was not certain others would feel the same way.

Commissioner Belisle questioned how the other mechanisms for charter amendments interacted with commission terms. She noted that City Council and the public already possessed authority to initiate charter amendments and asked whether those situations would require appointing entirely new commissioners if they occurred between regular review cycles. Assistant City Attorney Roth responded that he believed the public could directly propose charter amendments through petition

rather than convening an entirely new charter review commission.

Chair Barnhardt explained that the charter allowed approximately ten percent of electors to petition for charter amendments, which then required council action to place the matter on the ballot. Assistant City Attorney Roth confirmed that electors could gather signatures and place charter amendments before voters and stated that City Council possessed similar authority. He clarified that those procedures did not require establishing a formal charter review commission conducting months of meetings. Chair Barnhardt added that City Council technically could convene a working group to study issues and later advance proposed amendments to the ballot by council vote if desired.

Vice Chair Wester agreed and stated that, if significant public concerns arose between review cycles, City Council already possessed authority to establish a commission or otherwise address the issue. Assistant City Attorney Roth confirmed that understanding.

Chair Barnhardt stated that charter review commissions primarily functioned as citizen-led mechanisms for regular review but emphasized that other amendment avenues remained available whenever necessary. He reiterated Vice Chair Wester's earlier point that longer review intervals likely would encourage more intentional and thoughtful amendments rather than encouraging changes simply because the process occurred automatically.

Commissioner Maxwell stated that he supported the ten-year cycle and joked that, at 80 years old, he recognized the uncertainty of future participation in another commission ten years later.

Commissioner Hill reiterated that any change to the review cycle also would require corresponding revisions to charter language governing commissioner terms.

Commissioner Mularski stated that commissioners should serve only until voters considered the proposed amendments rather than remaining appointed for an entire ten-year period.

Clerk VanMeter noted that the charter already required the commission to reconvene after the election to certify any approved charter

amendments and formally certify the updated charter document. Chair Barnhardt joked that he looked forward to reconvening for that future certification meeting and seeing the commission members again.

Chair Barnhardt then asked whether commissioners had any additional discussion regarding the proposal. Hearing none, he moved to the next item.

Draft Ballot Measure Fourteen - (Article XXIII - General Provisions) An Amendment to Update the Charter's Non-Discrimination Protections

Chair Barnhardt moved discussion to General Provisions, Draft Ballot Measure Fourteen, which proposed updating the charter's non-discrimination protections. He explained that the proposal sought to align the charter's non-discrimination language with the city's existing Equal Employment Opportunity statement by updating protected categories to reflect current legal standards and administrative practices. Chair Barnhardt then opened the floor for discussion.

Commissioner Belisle stated that arguments existed on both sides of the issue but noted that she generally supported aligning the charter language with the standards Gahanna already used elsewhere.

Commissioner Reynolds stated that she believed the proposal carried practical significance because it promoted greater inclusivity. She noted that local governments increasingly needed to maintain clear written non-discrimination language and stated that situations could arise in which charter language became important. Commissioner Reynolds expressed surprise that the charter language had not already been updated to match the city's current policies and practices.

Vice Chair Wester stated that she believed everyone on the commission agreed that non-discrimination protections represented an important foundation of the Gahanna community. She described Gahanna as a diverse and welcoming community and stated that she fully supported maintaining inclusive and updated non-discrimination language. However, Vice Chair Wester expressed concern about reports she had heard regarding federal grant funding and eligibility restrictions tied to certain words or phrases appearing in foundational government

documents. She stated that she did not know whether updating the charter language could create funding consequences for the city and acknowledged uncertainty regarding how to balance inclusivity with those potential risks.

Chair Barnhardt stated that he raised similar concerns during the previous meeting. He stated that he found it unfortunate that the commission needed to evaluate the issue through the lens of funding eligibility but believed the concern remained realistic enough to consider carefully. Chair Barnhardt referenced examples of federal grant applications reportedly being disqualified because of certain language or terminology. He stated that he would not want the city to lose access to important infrastructure or project funding because of charter wording. Although he acknowledged the situation remained hypothetical, Chair Barnhardt stated that the commission needed to consider the current environment realistically.

Commissioner Hill stated that the proposal also involved alignment with the city's existing Equal Employment Opportunity language and other operational documents already in place. He stated that Vice President Jones previously presented the proposal from both a representation and alignment perspective. Commissioner Hill argued that, if the commission supported aligning other portions of the charter with existing practices and terminology, then consistency suggested the commission should consider alignment in this area as well. He stated that the issue ultimately involved determining where the people of Gahanna wanted to stand regarding inclusion and representation.

Commissioner Belisle stated that she wanted to raise two "devil's advocate" considerations despite generally supporting the proposal. First, she questioned what practical and political implications could arise if the commission advanced the amendment to voters and voters rejected it. Commissioner Belisle acknowledged that no legal requirement would force the city to roll back existing Equal Employment Opportunity protections but questioned whether rejection might create pressure to reconsider current city policies. Commissioner Belisle also stated that, when governments expanded protected categories beyond federal law, they risked creating exclusion by omission because specifically naming some groups could imply that unlisted groups held less importance. She stated that the city potentially shifted from simply

complying with federal law to affirmatively identifying which groups Gahanna valued.

Vice Chair Wester agreed that expanding highly specific language could create exclusion by omission if additional groups later required inclusion. However, she reiterated that the values behind the proposal remained extremely important to the fabric of Gahanna.

Chair Barnhardt stated that he could not recall the exact draft language proposed but noted that the commission repeatedly discussed avoiding overly prescriptive charter language throughout the review process. He questioned whether listing increasingly specific categories in the charter might require repeated future amendments as additional groups sought inclusion. Chair Barnhardt further questioned whether the charter represented the best avenue for expressing those values when the city already maintained inclusive statements and policies elsewhere that could adapt more easily over time. He stated that codifying highly specific categories in the charter appeared inconsistent with the commission's broader effort to preserve flexibility and avoid unnecessary prescriptive language.

Commissioner Maxwell agreed and stated that additional categories and circumstances likely would continue evolving over time.

Chair Barnhardt added that the city already maintained multiple inclusive statements and policies that city officials could revise more easily than the charter itself. He questioned whether codifying the language within the charter necessarily represented the most effective method for supporting inclusivity.

Vice Chair Wester asked whether the commission essentially discussed allowing the charter to defer to more flexible and adaptable city policies, similar to how the commission previously discussed allowing boards and commissions to establish their own operational rules.

Chair Barnhardt responded that he questioned whether the charter should simply defer to federal and state law while allowing city administrative policies and operational practices to expand beyond those minimum requirements where appropriate.

Commissioner Mularski stated that the issue reflected an “if it is not broken, do not fix it” situation. He explained that, because the city already maintained inclusive Equal Employment Opportunity language and policies, he did not believe the charter required additional revisions.

Commissioner Hill clarified that the current Equal Employment Opportunity language already aligned with the State of Ohio’s Equal Employment Opportunity categories. He stated that the proposal therefore reflected language the city already followed operationally.

Commissioner Maxwell stated that he initially supported the proposal strongly but changed his perspective during the discussion. He stated that he increasingly viewed the proposal as too specific for the charter and better suited to administrative policy.

Commissioner Belisle stated that all commissioners agreed inclusion represented an important part of Gahanna’s identity. She compared the discussion to the earlier strategic planning debate, explaining that she personally believed inclusivity and representation should remain deeply integrated into everything the city did. However, Commissioner Belisle stated that she continued grappling with whether the commission’s role involved advancing individual preferences or instead preserving flexibility and minimizing the need for repeated charter revisions.

Commissioner Hill stated that he appreciated the thoughtful discussion but expressed concern that the conversation focused too heavily on terminology currently perceived as controversial or politically risky. He referenced comments from Vice President Jones regarding language absent from the charter concerning active military service members. Commissioner Hill stated that commissioners appeared receptive when that omission came to their attention, which demonstrated that the charter could evolve thoughtfully when groups lacked representation. Commissioner Hill further stated that the issue ultimately concerned whether residents saw themselves represented in the city’s foundational document. He referenced veterans and active-duty military personnel as examples of groups who should feel recognized and valued by the community. Commissioner Hill stated that the proposal did not present extensive definitions or excessive specificity but instead sought to reflect the same categories and values the city already recognized operationally.

Vice Chair Wester asked whether Commissioner Hill's position centered on ensuring that individuals reading the charter would feel represented and included within the community's foundational document.

Commissioner Hill confirmed that understanding and reiterated that the issue involved communicating what the City of Gahanna valued and whom it sought to represent.

Commissioner Belisle stated that concerns about funding eligibility did not personally persuade her to oppose the proposal, although she acknowledged that voters might view the issue differently. She suggested that the commission potentially could add language clarifying that any listed categories did not represent an exhaustive list of protected groups.

Commissioner Hill stated that he recognized the risks involved but believed the commission possessed a unique opportunity to thoughtfully define what values and groups the city wished to recognize. He emphasized that the commission sought to act in the best interests of Gahanna residents rather than advancing personal agendas.

Commissioner Hill further stated that the commission should preserve flexibility while still ensuring that the charter reflected the city's core values and commitment to inclusion.

Commissioner Belisle then asked Commissioner Hill what actions the city should consider if voters rejected the proposal. Commissioner Hill responded that city attorney previously explained that rejection of the amendment would not legally require changes to the city's existing Equal Employment Opportunity policies or operational practices. However, Commissioner Hill acknowledged that such a result likely would prompt additional public discussion and council consideration regarding the city's policies and direction.

Commissioner Reynolds stated that she did not believe current political conditions should prevent the commission from advancing proposals that reflected community values and inclusion.

Chair Barnhardt then asked whether commissioners had any additional discussion regarding the proposal. Hearing none, he noted that no further agenda items remained.

Commissioner Mularski asked whether the commission would address the elected city attorney issue during the current meeting. Chair Barnhardt responded that the commission would continue that discussion during the following week's meeting and confirmed that commissioners would not score that proposal during the current session.

Chair Barnhardt then thanked the commission for its extensive and thoughtful discussion throughout the meeting. He referenced a note in his meeting script reminding the commission to stay focused in order to complete the agenda and stated that the commission successfully accomplished that goal.

G. CORRESPONDENCE AND ACTIONS.

[2026-0061](#)

Charter Review Commission Correspondence Received via Clerk

None.

H. POLL MEMBERS FOR COMMENT.

Commissioner Belisle stated that she again wanted to acknowledge the strength of the commission as a group. She stated that she appreciated serving with individuals who could engage in robust and thoughtful discussion.

Vice Chair Wester stated that she agreed with Commissioner Belisle's comments and had been thinking the same thing.

Commissioner Hill stated that he would be absent during the following two meetings, as he previously communicated to the commission. He stated that he would submit his information in advance so the commission could consider it during deliberations.

Chair Barnhardt stated that he echoed the comments made by the other commissioners. He stated that he appreciated the opportunity to engage in the commission's discussions because several proposals challenged opinions that he previously considered fixed and well established. Chair Barnhardt stated that hearing the perspectives of fellow commissioners caused him to reconsider and reflect further on several issues. He stated that he appreciated the robust conversation throughout the process.

I. **ADJOURNMENT.**

With no further business before the Charter Review Commission, Chair Barnhardt adjourned the meeting at 9:12 p.m.

Jeremy A. VanMeter
Clerk of Council

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

Ethan Barnhardt