



City of Gahanna

200 South Hamilton Road
Gahanna, Ohio 43230

Meeting Minutes Planning Commission Workshop

Michael Suriano, Chair
Michael Greenberg
Elizabeth Laser
James Mako
Sarah Pollyea
Thomas Shapaka
Michael Tamarkin

Sophia McGuire, Deputy Clerk of Council

Wednesday, April 8, 2026

5:45 PM

City Hall, Council Chambers

A. OPEN MEETING

The Gahanna Planning Commission met in a workshop session on Wednesday, April 8, 2026 at 5:45 p.m. Members Laser, Pollyea, Suriano, Tamarkin, Greenberg, and Mako were present. Assistant City Attorney Matt Roth, Planning Director Michael Blackford, and City Planner Maddie Capka were also present.

Vice Chair Suriano opened the meeting and reminded attendees that the intention of the workshop was for presentation and discussion on prospective applications, and no items would be voted on during the meeting.

B. ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

[2026-0066](#)

261 W. Johnstown Road presentation

A presentation was provided regarding property located at 261 W. Johnstown Road. Presenters included Melanie Wollenberg, Consultant for MW Development Services; Ron Stokes, LARS LLC., property owner; Matt Lones, Architect with Orange Frog Design Group; David Huston of Dublin Building Systems; Steve Fox of V3 Companies; and Will DeVere, a student of Ohio State Finance & Real Estate.

Mr. Lones stated that the proposal involved upgrading a standard pre-engineered metal panel to an architectural panel. He provided samples and explained that the smaller sample panel would appear on

the canopies, while the larger panel would serve as the primary field material with ribbed panels running horizontally. When asked whether the corrugation created the vertical surface, Mr. Lones confirmed that it did, but clarified that the panels would run horizontally rather than vertically.

Mr. Lones explained that the middle elevations showed existing trees that provided a buffer to the east between the site and the existing apartment complex. He stated that the existing building to the west consisted of an older pre-engineered metal building with unattractive metal siding. He stated that the proposed building would improve the appearance of the site and requested a variance to allow metal paneling as the primary exterior material outside the IM district.

Mr. Lones stated that the plans showed the existing trees as accurately as possible. He explained that the proposed building would have a low eave height of 18 feet and a high eave height of 20 feet, while the existing trees averaged approximately 25 feet in height. He stated that the development would preserve all mature trees that could remain and that landscaping would fill any gaps created during clearing.

Mr. Lones presented photographs of another building currently under construction that used similar metal panels in black. He clarified that the proposed project would use gray panels rather than black and stated that the top photograph best represented the finished appearance.

Mr. Stokes then presented photographs intended to show the relationship between the existing building, the proposed future building, and the surrounding tree coverage. He stated that the photographs demonstrated the height and density of the trees and the limited visibility between the site and neighboring properties to the east and west. He identified views facing west, south, north, and west again. Mr. Stokes noted that the photographs had been taken several weeks earlier and stated that visibility would decrease further once the trees gained additional foliage.

Melanie Wollenberg of MW Development Services stated that the foliage had not yet reached full bloom when the photographs were taken. She stated that the aerial image included in the meeting packets best demonstrated the density of the foliage surrounding the site. She explained that the development team intended to preserve as many

perimeter trees as possible and stated that the existing screening and buffer supported the request for a reduced six-foot buffer.

Ms. Wollenberg stated that the City Forester had visited the site and tagged scrub trees that could be removed and identified trees that needed to remain. She stated that the development team would likely invite the forester back to the site to ensure compliance with tree preservation and replacement requirements.

Ms. Wollenberg then addressed the request for Conditional Use. She stated that the property carried a General Commercial zoning designation and that the land use plan identified the area for retail, office, and residential uses. She explained that the original preference involved an office warehouse use and stated that City Planner Maddie Capka had worked closely with the applicant through earlier multifamily proposals. Wollenberg explained that sanitary capacity issues prevented the construction of a 20-unit or 30-unit apartment building. She stated that discussions with the City engineering staff and outside engineering consultants confirmed that the sanitary sewer along Johnstown Road required upgrades and could not support a larger apartment development. She stated that the office warehouse use represented the least intensive sanitary sewer use and fit appropriately within the surrounding area because of the adjacent metal building occupied by Midwest Auto.

Ms. Wollenberg presented additional photographs of the adjacent metal building and the apartment complex located to the east. She stated that the proposed office warehouse use would consist of approximately 10 to 25 percent office space, depending on the tenant, with the remainder serving as ancillary warehouse space connected to the offices. She emphasized that the development would not contain separate warehouse operations and described the project as small scale. Wollenberg stated that this type of building remained in very short supply in the market and noted that Economic Development Director Jeff Gottke, in attendance, could attest to the demand for this product type. Wollenberg further stated that vacancy rates for similar spaces remained very low.

She stated that the proposed use would remain compatible with surrounding properties because of the adjacent metal building, the existing and proposed screening, and the limited visibility from the

neighboring multifamily development. Wollenberg then invited questions from the Commission.

Vice Chair Suriano provided the Commission members with an opportunity to ask questions.

Commissioner Mako asked about access to the site and noted that the proposed development would share a driveway with the existing building adjacent to Johnstown Road. He asked whether a shared use agreement or access easement had been established with the current property owner. Wollenberg responded that the project would utilize the existing driveway owned by Lars Properties and stated that discussions with the City Engineer indicated that the project would not require a traffic impact study. Commissioner Mako clarified that his question concerned ownership and access rights related to the shared driveway. Mr. Stokes explained that the same ownership group owned the existing building, driveway, and proposed development site and stated that there was no intention to split the parcel. Commissioner Mako acknowledged the explanation and stated that shared access between two buildings on one parcel commonly raised questions during review.

Commissioner Mako then asked for clarification regarding the proposed detention basin located south of the property and asked whether the basin would remain dry. Mr. Fox confirmed that the basin would function as a dry basin. He further stated that the basin would likely hold water only a few times each year and then only temporarily for an hour or two. Commissioner Mako stated that he requested the clarification because basins adjacent to apartment complexes often raised safety concerns.

Commissioner Mako next asked for clarification regarding the requested variance for building materials and asked whether the variance related to the horizontal orientation of the metal panels. Mr. Lones explained that the Citywide Overlay standards permitted only brick, stone, and stone veneer as primary materials and did not allow metal siding or metal panels as primary exterior materials. He referenced Section 1107.02(D), which permitted metal panels as secondary materials up to 20 percent of a façade. He further explained that the zoning text allowed metal panels as primary materials only within IM districts and restricted their use to 25 percent of rear elevations. Mr. Lones stated that the code did not specify whether panels must run vertically or horizontally. He noted that the code

prohibited bright, shiny metal finishes but otherwise prohibited metal panels as primary materials citywide. He stated that the requested variance sought permission to use metal panels as the primary material because the building would sit more than 200 feet from the road and remain screened by trees and neighboring buildings.

Mr. Mako then asked about the requested setback variance on the east side of the property and suggested that the request likely resulted from the need to accommodate the building footprint and parking layout. Mr. Fox confirmed that the narrow site constrained the building width and parking configuration. He stated that the proposal provided as much setback space as possible and noted that the deficiency measured only six inches. Mr. Fox added that the project would include additional landscaping and trees if necessary. Wollenberg also stated that the City's code permitted de minimis variances of less than 10 percent.

Mr. Mako clarified that he referred specifically to the reduction of the east buffer from 20 feet to 9.4 feet. Wollenberg acknowledged the clarification and stated that staff interpreted the buffer and setback requirements as matching dimensions. She reiterated that the site remained narrow and that the building already sat at the minimum width possible. She stated that the development team would preserve the dense existing screening and supplement the landscaping as necessary to achieve the required opacity and screening standards within the buffer area.

Ms. Pollyea asked about the plans for the existing building on the property. Mr. Stokes responded that the building would remain as it currently existed and stated that the building remained approximately 98 percent leased. She then asked whether the applicant had considered the amount of additional traffic the new building might generate, despite not being required to complete a traffic study. Mr. Fox stated that he did not have exact traffic figures but estimated that the flex office building could contain as many as five users with several employees each, resulting in approximately 10 to 15 trips during the morning and evening peak periods. He characterized the traffic increase as insignificant and stated that the City's consulting engineer reviewed the traffic calculations and determined that the proposal did not meet the threshold requiring a traffic study.

Ms. Pollyea asked whether the truck bays shown on the plans indicated

truck-related operations on the site. Mr. Fox explained that the typical tenant would likely consist of small-scale service contractors such as painters or electricians who needed a place to park vehicles, store equipment, and operate throughout the workday. He stated that tenants would arrive, retrieve equipment, leave for daily work activities, and return at the end of the day and emphasized that the use would remain low intensity during both daytime and nighttime hours.

Ms. Pollyea then asked whether the original plan involved modifying the current building and converting it into multifamily housing. Mr. Stokes clarified that the proposal had never involved modifying the existing building and that the development team had originally planned to construct 20 to 30 apartment units on the portion of the property now proposed for flex office space. He stated that sanitary sewer limitations prevented approval of the apartment project. Mr. Stokes explained that the office warehouse use represented the least intensive use in terms of sewer demand and stated that apartments would have been his preferred option. Ms. Pollyea thanked Mr. Stokes for the clarification.

Ms. Pollyea then asked Ms. Wollenberg whether the site consisted of a single parcel. Ms. Wollenberg confirmed that the property remained one parcel and explained that the site totaled approximately two acres, with about one acre in front and one acre in the rear consisting of vacant wooded land where the proposed building would be constructed.

Ms. Pollyea then directed a question to the administration regarding the conditional use request. She asked how approval of a conditional use for one parcel containing two buildings with different uses would affect future uses on the property. Ms. Capka responded that conditional use approval would not affect the existing use and stated that any future conditional uses would require separate applications and approvals. Ms. Pollyea asked whether changes to the existing building's use would require another conditional use application and sought clarification regarding whether the conditional use applied to the entire parcel or only to the proposed building. Director Blackford responded that the conditional use would remain specific to the proposed project. He explained that approval of the conditional use would not create a blanket authorization for future uses on the property and any changes to the site plan would be reviewed by Planning Commission.

Ms. Laser stated that she wondered how the nearby homeowner at the rear of the Brookhaven area might feel about the proposed development because the property owner currently enjoyed a wooded backyard setting. She asked whether the applicant had spoken with that homeowner.

Ms. Wollenberg responded that the development team had attempted several times to contact the homeowner and planned to send a letter requesting a meeting to explain the project. Mr. Fox stated that the home sat approximately 194 feet from the proposed building and that significant foliage and a stream separated the properties. He explained that the stream corridor already contained substantial tree coverage extending nearly to the rear yard of the home. He added that the site already maintained an existing natural buffer ranging from approximately 50 to 100 feet and that the project would retain at least 15 feet of dense landscaping and trees. Mr. Fox expressed the opinion that the homeowner likely would not see the building even after some tree removal occurred.

Ms. Laser then stated that she had visited the site around 4:45 p.m. the previous day during a busy period and observed that the driveway area appeared tight. She asked about the expected number and type of vehicles that would use the site and stated that she shared concerns about maneuverability. Mr. Lones responded that the building would function as a flex warehouse space intended primarily for service-oriented businesses. He explained that the expected vehicles would consist mainly of service vans or trucks operated by plumbers, electricians, and similar contractors rather than large delivery trucks. Ms. Laser stated that those answers addressed her questions.

Mr. Greenberg asked whether the applicant planned to install fencing around the surface impoundment or whether landscaping alone would screen the area from neighboring properties. Mr. Fox responded that the development did not include plans for fencing because the basin would remain dry almost all the time. Mr. Greenberg then asked about the design capacity of the proposed surface impoundment. Mr. Fox explained that the development required detention because the project would convert grassy areas into impervious parking surfaces. He stated that the detention basin would release stormwater at pre-development runoff rates and estimated the capacity at approximately 6,000 cubic feet

per acre. He further explained that the development covered slightly less than one acre and that the basin would measure approximately three feet deep with four-to-one side slopes to facilitate mowing and maintenance.

Mr. Greenberg then asked whether the basin would discharge water and where the discharge would flow. Mr. Fox confirmed that the basin would discharge stormwater and stated that the development team continued discussions with neighboring property owners to obtain an easement allowing discharge into the nearby stream, which represented the site's natural drainage outlet. He added that a neighboring parcel to the north used a similar easement arrangement through an adjacent backyard to reach the stream. Mr. Fox also noted the existence of a wider easement owned by the City of Gahanna between the creek and the property that contained a sanitary sewer line serving the City. Mr. Greenberg stated that the applicant would need to secure the drainage easement before proceeding with the project. Mr. Fox responded that the development could not block drainage and explained that the site could utilize a level spreader if necessary, although direct discharge through a pipe to the stream represented the preferred and easiest solution.

Mr. Greenberg then asked whether the individual units within the building could house different businesses and referred to them as "business condos." Mr. Stokes responded that the building could accommodate a single tenant occupying the entire structure or multiple tenants divided among two, three, or four spaces.

Mr. Greenberg asked whether the applicant intended to prohibit certain activities such as manufacturing operations or hazardous waste storage within the building. Ms. Wollenberg responded that the City's zoning code regulated allowable uses and stated that the project would comply with those requirements. She further stated that cleaner uses would benefit both the building management and the neighboring properties because visitors to the new building would pass by the existing building to access the site. She added that the City's code restricted uses within the small-scale industrial category.

Mr. Greenberg then asked about fire safety provisions shown on the plans. Mr. Fox explained that the project would include a private fire hydrant located near the center of the site. He stated that the development team had met with the Fire Department several times to

address fire safety requirements and hose access throughout the site. Mr. Greenberg asked whether the Fire Department would review and approve fire safety measures and emergency access. Ms. Capka confirmed that the Fire Department would review both the planning applications and the building permit.

Mr. Greenberg next asked how the site would handle trash collection for tenants. Mr. Stokes stated that the property already contained an existing dumpster and enough space to expand trash facilities if necessary. He indicated the location of the existing dumpster that currently served the site on the projected slide.

Mr. Greenberg then asked whether the project met parking requirements. Ms. Capka responded that the proposal exceeded the minimum parking requirements established by code. Mr. Greenberg stated that he had no further questions.

Mr. Tamarkin asked for clarification regarding the parking requirements for the proposed 12,000-square-foot building. Capka responded that the City classified the use as industrial within the parking table and required only one parking space per 1,000 square feet, resulting in a minimum requirement of 12 spaces.

Mr. Tamarkin then asked whether 30 parking spaces would adequately serve unknown future tenants given the potential variety of businesses. Ms. Wollenberg responded that the proposed parking count reflected market expectations and noted that some developments remained under-parked while others contained excess parking. She stated that the proposal intentionally exceeded the City's minimum parking requirement in order to meet market demand. She further explained that the parking spaces accommodated passenger vehicles rather than trucks and reiterated that the intended tenant mix included e-commerce and fulfillment services, trade companies, small logistics operations, delivery services, event production businesses, and medical or professional office users.

Mr. Tamarkin then returned the discussion to sanitary sewer capacity issues. He stated that sanitary sewer approval did not fall within the Commission's authority but questioned the conclusion that the sanitary system could not support a 30-unit apartment building while supporting a

12,000-square-foot office warehouse building that could potentially contain water-intensive uses or more employees than the proposed apartment development. Mr. Fox responded that residential uses generated substantially higher daily water consumption because residents used showers, sinks, and other household fixtures. He estimated residential demand at approximately 350 gallons per person per day and stated that 30 apartment units with multiple occupants would create significant sewer demand. He contrasted that with office uses, which he estimated at approximately 20 gallons per person per day.

Mr. Suriano provided feedback from his standpoint as an architect. He stated that he understood the use of corrugated metal on a building of this type and acknowledged the existence of similar buildings near the site and elsewhere. Mr. Suriano stated that as the applicant moved toward a full application, he believed the project should incorporate a secondary material, particularly a more durable material at the base of the building instead of extending metal panels directly to grade. He suggested masonry, brick, or another material that would visually anchor the project, reduce the overall percentage of metal panels, and add durability and variation to the façade.

Mr. Suriano then asked whether any Commissioners had final questions or comments. Mr. Mako asked about the anticipated timeline for returning with a formal application if the project moved forward. Ms. Wollenberg responded that the team had completed only conceptual design work at that point because they wanted Commission feedback before advancing the design further. She stated that the timeline depended on both design progress and tenant marketing efforts but expressed the desire to proceed as quickly as possible.

Mr. Suriano thanked the applicant for attending the workshop and stated that the Commission appreciated reviewing projects before formal application submission.

C. ADJOURNMENT

The workshop was adjourned at 6:28 p.m.

