



City of Gahanna

Meeting Minutes

Finance Committee

200 South Hamilton Road
Gahanna, Ohio 43230

Michael Schnetzer, Chair
Merisa K. Bowers
Jamille Jones
Nancy R. McGregor
Kaylee Padova
Stephen A. Renner
Trenton I. Weaver

Jeremy A. VanMeter, Clerk of Council

Monday, November 25, 2024

City Hall, Council Chambers

Immediately following Committee of the Whole at 7:00 PM on November 25, 2024

A. CALL TO ORDER:

Councilmember Michael Schnetzer, Chair, called the meeting to order at 7:59 p.m. The agenda was published on November 22, 2024. All members were present for the meeting. There were no additions or corrections to the agenda.

B. DISCUSSIONS:

Law, Council, Planning, Economic Development & Mayor's Office Budgets

[ORD-0065-2024](#) AN ORDINANCE ADOPTING APPROPRIATIONS FOR CURRENT EXPENSES AND OTHER EXPENDITURES OF THE CITY OF GAHANNA DURING THE FISCAL YEAR 2025

Chairman Schnetzer provided a recap of the budgeting process for this year. He explained that unlike previous years, where the entire budget was discussed during each Finance Committee meeting, the Council had agreed to review the budget in sections. This new approach breaks the review into smaller, department-focused discussions. For the evening's agenda, the focus was on the Law Department, Council Office, Planning Department, Economic Development Department, and Mayor's Office.

Law Department

City Attorney Priya Tamilarasan presented an overview of the Law Department's 2024 achievements and 2025 priorities. She began by highlighting three main categories of achievements for 2024. The first

was ordinance review, which included the review and drafting of various ordinances presented to Council. Specific ordinances included updates to the general offense and traffic code, addressing distracted driving, discriminatory intimidation, and dangerous and vicious animals. Additional work involved revising the zoning code penalty section and the backflow prevention code in collaboration with the Department of Public Services.

The second area of focus was prosecution, which involved managing cases in Franklin County Common Pleas Court, Municipal Court, Gahanna Mayor's Court, and Environmental Court. The department also handled special prosecution cases for other jurisdictions in situations involving conflicts of interest and mediated a fair housing complaint under the City's fair housing code. For Environmental Court, Attorney Tamilarasan explained its dual role in criminal prosecution for animal code violations and nuisance actions for repeated unresolved code violations. Two potential nuisance cases were resolved without requiring additional litigation.

The third category addressed code compliance and best practices implementation. This included reviewing public body and public record policies, administrative policies, and procedures, as well as overseeing all contract reviews for the City.

For 2025, the Law Department outlined several priorities:

Continued Ordinance Review and Legal Opinions: This will remain a key area of focus for the department.

Mayor's Court Improvements: The department plans to identify, implement, and recommend best practices to enhance systemic due process protections. These improvements may include the use of a public defender and more structured diversion or community service programs.

Fiscal Strategy and OVI Prosecution: The shift of OVI (Operating a Vehicle Impaired) prosecution from Franklin County Municipal Court to Gahanna Mayor's Court is expected to generate additional revenue. This revenue may support initiatives like a public defender program.

Opioid Settlement Funds: Attorney Tamilarasan will identify and recommend appropriate uses for settlement funds received through opioid litigation, ensuring compliance with the restrictions tied to opioid remediation.

Digitization Efforts: The department aims to digitize archived files and reduce the need for a physical law library at 825 Tech Center Drive by transitioning to digital resources.

Attorney Tamarasan then reviewed the general expenditures for the department. She noted the inclusion of actuals for 2022 and 2023, appropriated funds for 2024, and the 2025 budget request. There was a shift in some budget items, such as insurance premiums and deductibles, from the Law Department to Administrative Services. However, the overall budget remained largely unchanged. She concluded by confirming that the Law Department does not generate revenue and, therefore, did not have figures to report under that category.

Councilmember Bowers asked for clarification on the potential additional revenue generated by shifting OVI (Operating a Vehicle Impaired) cases to Mayor's Court. She inquired if this revenue would be reflected in the Mayor's Court budget. Attorney Tamarasan explained that since the change is still in the implementation phase, it was not included in the current budget projections for Mayor's Court. She noted that the projections were based on current trends and that the additional revenue would likely be reflected in next year's actuals. Any adjustments or allocations based on that revenue would be proposed for the 2026 budget.

Councilmember McGregor inquired about the \$132,000 allocated for Contract Services in the Law Department's budget and requested examples of its uses. Attorney Tamarasan explained that part of the Contract Services allocation is used for a contract prosecutor who assists with Mayor's Court and a contract administrative services personnel who supports both Attorney Roth and herself. This administrative staff member is also responsible for file preparation, office tasks, and leading the effort to digitize files and reduce paper use in the office. The majority of the Contract Services budget, however, is allocated for outside counsel. These services include support for civil litigation and consulting in specialized legal areas.

Council Office

Jeremy VanMeter, Clerk of Council, presented the Council Office budget and provided an overview of the office's responsibilities, achievements in 2024, and priorities for 2025. He explained that the Council Office is staffed with three full-time personnel: the Clerk of Council (VanMeter), a Deputy Clerk of Council, and a Management Analyst for Communications and Research. The office's primary function is to provide administrative support to City Council, Planning Commission, the Board of Zoning and

Building Appeals, Civil Service Commission, Fair Housing Board, Records Commission, Property Appeals Board, and the Charter Review Commission, which convenes every five years. VanMeter detailed the support services provided to these entities, which include agenda preparation, minutes, legal notices, legislation drafting, budgeting, training, onboarding and offboarding members, internal and external communications, live streaming, technology support, constituent services, and acting as a liaison between the community, legislative bodies, and City Administration. The office also manages the City's records program, which includes creating records policies and procedures, managing public records requests, and overseeing records retention and disposal. He emphasized because of these functions, there was no single department or division within the City that the Council Office did not touch.

The Clerk highlighted several significant achievements in 2024:

Professional Development: Deputy Clerk Sophia McGuire earned the Certified Records Analyst (CRA) designation, which is rare in Ohio, with fewer than 30 certified individuals statewide. She is currently pursuing the next level of certification as a Certified Records Manager. McGuire also presented at the National Association of Government Archives and Records Administrators (NAGARA) conference on best practices in records management. Management Analyst Jessica Hilts joined the office in 2024, bringing experience as a former Clerk in Westerville, as well as Planning Department experience. She has focused on developing a communication plan for Council and department stakeholders, creating newsletter content, brochures, and conducting legislative research. A Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission (MORPC) intern was engaged in records inventory, auditing deeds and easements, researching community reinvestment area records, and implementing a \$3,000 Ohio Historical Records Advisory Board grant for records preservation.

Digitization Efforts: Ten historical records books, encompassing around 300 pages each, were digitized. These records spanned from the 1880s, when Gahanna was a village, to the 1970s. The office aims to have all Council meeting minutes through 1970 accessible via the City's online Legistar platform by the end of the year, significantly enhancing transparency. Collaboration with the Mayor's Court led to identifying 52 historical court dockets and 10 boxes of permanent annexation files for digitization. A project involving 91 boxes of Planning Commission records is underway, with half already sent to an external firm for digitization. Once completed, the physical files will be moved to an off-site facility, freeing up valuable space.

Training Initiatives: The office hosted a records training day called “Game Day,” featuring activities like Records Jeopardy and file naming exercises to engage employees in understanding the importance of public records management. Staff worked directly with departmental liaisons in Engineering and Water and Utility Billing to prepare records for the upcoming move to 825 Tech Center Drive. Additional efforts included troubleshooting records management with HR, Parks and Recreation, and Planning departments.

Public Records Requests: Public records requests reached one of their highest levels in 2024, with 253 requests processed. This figure does not include police department requests, which were significantly more but managed separately. The shared NextRequest public records portal for the City currently contains over 16,000 filed records. The office collaborates closely with the City Attorney’s Office on complex legal requests.

VanMeter outlined the office’s goals for 2025:

Move to 825 Tech Center Drive: The office is preparing records and logistics for the relocation to the new municipal building.

Development of Municipal Archives: Plans are underway to create a municipal archive to preserve and showcase historical city records and improve public access to the City’s history.

Training for Boards and Commissions: Building on the 2024 development of a board and commission manual, the office plans to implement “Training 2.0” in collaboration with HR, leveraging the City’s learning management system to provide enhanced resources and onboarding for commission members.

Communications Plan: The office intends to expand public engagement efforts through improved email communication, newsletters, website content, and community events to promote Council activities and encourage resident participation.

The office’s expenditures for 2025 are consistent with 2024. A notable budget item is continued funding for a MORPC intern, who will assist with project-based tasks, including preparing for the 2026 Charter Review Commission. The intern’s work will focus on understanding the commission’s historical function and providing support for its future operations. Although limited, the Council Office does generate some revenue. This primarily comes from liquor permit application fees

recorded under Council Office and appeal filing fees for various board and commissions. These revenues are categorized under licenses and miscellaneous permits.

Councilmember Jones raised a question about the 240-plus records requests processed by the Council Office this year. She asked whether this number was indicative of positive performance and whether there was additional data available to contextualize the volume of requests, such as specific topics or trends.

Clerk VanMeter explained that the NextRequest system used by the office allows for categorization of records requests by City division or department, which provides a clearer understanding of where requests are concentrated. Additionally, the system can identify requests submitted by media outlets, such as 10TV or other news channels, which often involve multiple departments, including the Police Department and the Public Information Officer. VanMeter noted that while it is difficult to determine whether the number of requests is inherently "good" or "bad," the increase in requests reflects the growing demand for transparency and public engagement. He assured the Council that the office is monitoring this trend closely and has so far been able to manage the workload effectively. The office continues to support other departments in accessing and organizing records, ensuring that requests are fulfilled in a timely and efficient manner.

Planning Department

Senior Director of Administrative Services Miranda Vollmer provided an overview of the Planning Department's achievements in 2024 and goals for 2025. She highlighted that in 2024, the new zoning code was adopted, and the department implemented new permitting software. Additionally, the Planning and Engineering Department, with support from Management Analyst Kelsey Bartholomew, received the High-Performing Government Award from OpenGov at this year's conference. The department also conducted over 4,000 inspections during the year.

For 2025, Vollmer stated that the department plans to continue updates to the zoning code and conduct an initial review of the land use plan.

She presented the planned expenditures for the Planning Department, followed by a slide on the department's revenue. In response to a question about the Residential Plans Examiner position, Vollmer explained that the role was identified through a job audit conducted at the end of 2023. The City's consultant recommended reclassifying an

existing employee's role to Residential Plans Examiner, as the duties performed aligned with that job title. This position was added in the 2024 budget. She also noted that the department successfully hired a Building Inspector in 2024.

Chairman Schnetzer asked a clarifying question regarding the \$300,000 allocation for strategic land acquisition. Vollmer confirmed that this allocation would be addressed in the capital discussion at the end of the presentations, as capital items are grouped separately in the budget discussion process.

Mayor's Office

Director Vollmer provided a summary of the achievements completed by the Mayor's Office in 2024. She reported the creation and launch of the inaugural Gahanna Citizen Academy, the completion of the design development phase, and groundbreaking for the municipal complex. The City also secured an Aa1 credit rating. Vollmer highlighted the implementation of the Capital Improvement Plan and the launch of Gahanna Energy Plus, the City's Community Choice Aggregation program. Progress was made on advancing the Creekside Redevelopment Strategy, and the Mayor's Office coordinated and executed the Gahanna 175 celebration.

For 2025, Director Vollmer outlined several priorities, including the completion and adoption of "Our Gahanna," a new strategic plan and economic development plan to guide the City's programs and initiatives. She emphasized the development of a Continuity of Operations Plan for all City divisions and the implementation of a Mayor's Advisory Round Table to strengthen relationships and gather stakeholder input on issues affecting the business community. She noted preparations for the transition of all City operations to 825 Tech Center Drive and continued evaluation of opportunities for the property at 200 South Hamilton to maximize return on investment for the City and its residents. Vollmer then transitioned to the next section, addressing marketing and communications achievements and priorities.

The Marketing and Communications team reported their 2024 achievements, which included expanding communication channels with residents by introducing written newsletters included with water bills for those receiving printed bills. They also promoted digital accessibility by adding e-newsletters, meeting agendas, and project alerts. Social media engagement increased by 1.6 percent across all platforms, with significant increases on LinkedIn at 12.5 percent and Instagram at 14.3 percent. There was a 68 percent increase in social media impressions

and a 154 percent increase in engagement through posts and comments, attributed to the addition of stories and reels. The team also created and published materials for City initiatives, including Gahanna Energy Plus, Gahanna 175, and various Parks and Recreation programs.

Looking ahead to 2025, the Marketing and Communications team aims to identify opportunities to expand communications to reach a multi-generational audience. They plan to provide responsive communications and marketing to support City departments, develop overall communications and marketing strategies to support the business community, and ensure consistency in city-wide branding across all departments and initiatives.

Director Vollmer concluded by presenting the expenditures for the Mayor's Office and invited questions from the Council regarding the report. The meeting then proceeded to the question portion related to the Mayor's Office and its initiatives.

Council Questions

Mayor's Advisory Panel

Mayor Jadwin addressed a question regarding the role of the Mayor's Advisory Panel, whether it was included in the 2024 budget, and if there were any associated costs that were not utilized. Mayor Jadwin explained that the purpose of the panel is to strengthen the connection between the City and its business community. The panel is intended to function as a quarterly roundtable discussion involving members of the Mayor's Office, the economic development team, and representatives from businesses of various sizes throughout Gahanna. These discussions aim to gather input, feedback, and guidance on the needs and challenges businesses face, including topics such as permitting processes, workforce needs, housing, and transportation for employees. The Mayor confirmed that economic development would be a key partner in shaping the framework for the panel. The initiative was included in the 2024 budget with a nominal cost of approximately \$6,000, anticipated for expenses such as printed materials and meeting-related costs. She clarified that any unused funds by the end of the year would be returned to the budget. The initiative is recurring because it is designed to facilitate ongoing engagement and dialogue with the business community.

Councilmember Padova asked whether the roundtable had already been formed or if it was still in development. Mayor Jadwin responded that the framework for the panel was still in progress and would be shaped in

conjunction with the economic development strategy and the City's ongoing strategic planning process. Businesses would be interviewed as part of this process, and the feedback collected would help refine the structure of the advisory panel.

Councilmember Jones sought clarification on whether the advisory panel would include residents or if it would focus solely on the business community. Mayor Jadwin clarified that the panel would be strictly for businesses, including small, minority-owned, medium-sized, and large businesses. The goal is to understand the challenges these businesses face and identify ways the City can adjust its operations to better support them. She also noted that proactive business visits by the economic development team have been a valuable tool for identifying growth plans and potential development projects.

Vice President Weaver thanked the Mayor for the clarification and additional information. He emphasized the importance of ensuring broad representation among Gahanna's businesses in terms of size, ownership, and other factors. He expressed appreciation for the effort being made to include diverse perspectives in the initiative.

Workshops with Community Partner Organizations

Mayor Jadwin provided an update on the workshops with community partner organizations. She began by explaining the purpose of the workshops, which was to address the perception that Gahanna has historically been a siloed community. She noted that while many organizations work hard to make an impact, collaboration between them has not always been strong. The workshops aim to foster collaboration and alignment among organizations to strengthen the city as a whole. The workshops initially involved Visit Gahanna, the Gahanna Area Chamber, Economic Development, and the City, as these entities have the most overlap in mission, function, and audience. Over time, the workshops expanded to include additional organizations, with plans to engage others in the future. Feedback from participating organizations has been positive, with some participants noting that they were unaware of certain other organizations and that the workshops have helped identify new opportunities for collaboration. One key initiative emerging from the workshops is the creation of a community calendar. Mayor Jadwin explained that while the City maintains an events calendar on its website, its scope is limited to City-related activities. The proposed community calendar would serve as a shared resource for nonprofit organizations to promote fundraisers, volunteer opportunities, and events, offering the community a centralized location for accessing this information. This initiative will be further discussed at the next workshop,

scheduled for the following week. The Mayor stated that these workshops would continue into 2025.

President Bowers thanked the Mayor for the update and posed two follow-up questions. First, she inquired about the metrics for measuring the success of the workshops and asked how their impact is being assessed. Second, she asked for clarification on the facilitation of the workshops, noting her understanding that an outside consultant is being paid by the City, and questioned whether partner organizations were contributing financially.

Mayor Jadwin responded that to date, partner organizations have not contributed financially but acknowledged that this topic had come up in recent conversations. During a meeting, both the Chamber of Commerce and Visit Gahanna expressed that they found the workshops valuable and indicated interest in contributing to their continuation. The Mayor emphasized that the workshops were not intended to be an ongoing paid facilitation and that future discussions would address transitioning to a model where organizations meet independently on a quarterly basis. Regarding metrics for success, the Mayor stated that increased collaboration among organizations and implementation of community-wide initiatives with broad support would indicate success. She noted that cost discussions would also be addressed in the upcoming workshop.

President Bowers then asked about the current budget for the workshops. Mayor Jadwin confirmed that the cost has been less than \$10,000 and that a maximum of \$5,000 was allocated to transition the initiative to an independent model in 2025. The goal is for organizations to take ownership of the process and define their measures of success.

President Bowers further asked if any surveys, metrics, or audits had been conducted to assess the workshops' impact beyond anecdotal feedback. Mayor Jadwin stated that no such tools had been utilized at this point.

Marketing & Communications Questions

Contract Services

Director Vollmer introduced the next set of questions regarding Marketing and Communications on page 64 of the budget document, specifically addressing the driver of the increase in Contract Services. She noted that Director of Finance Joann Bury would provide clarification.

Director Bury explained that the total amount listed for Contract Services on page 64 needed to be reduced by \$100,000. She clarified that the \$100,000 allocated to the Community Grant Program had initially been listed under the Department of Administrative Services but was later reassigned to the Finance Department. Although the account was updated correctly, the department name was not updated in the tables, resulting in a discrepancy. Consequently, there is no actual increase in Contract Services compared to the previous year; rather, there is a decrease of approximately \$11,000.

Chairman Schnetzer sought clarification regarding the table on page 64, which showed an increase of \$88,525 in Contract Services. He confirmed with Director Bury that the \$100,000 should be removed from that total as it had been reallocated, likely to the Finance Department based on earlier discussions. Director Bury confirmed this was correct.

Vice President Weaver asked for clarification on the purpose of the \$100,000 allocated to Finance. Director Bury confirmed that the amount was for the Community Grant Program.

Councilmember Jones asked if the \$100,000 was currently reflected in the Marketing and Communications budget but would ultimately appear elsewhere. Director Bury confirmed this, stating that while the account had been updated under Finance, the department designation in the budget tables had not been corrected. Councilmember Jones further confirmed that the 2025 request for Contract Services should total \$267,000. Director Bury agreed.

Chairman Schnetzer followed up, asking if the corresponding table for Finance correctly reflected the \$100,000 allocation. Director Bury clarified that the table would need to be adjusted to include the additional \$100,000. However, she reassured the Council that the account-level information in the appendix and the appropriation ordinance were correct, and the discrepancy was limited to the tables.

New Resident Packet

Director Vollmer addressed questions regarding line items from the marketing and communications budget. She began by explaining the \$12,000 allocated for the new resident packet, which includes costs for graphic design, printing, and branded folders, as well as the informational materials that will be included in the packet. No questions were raised by the council regarding this item.

Podcast Initiative

Director Vollmer then provided details on the \$15,000 allocated for the podcast initiative and explained its purpose within the City's communication plan. The podcast aims to expand communication channels, targeting audiences different from those typically reached through social media. It is intended to support marketing for the City, particularly in the areas of business attraction and workforce development, with plans for bimonthly episodes.

Councilmember McGregor questioned whether the City truly needed a podcast. Mayor Jadwin responded affirmatively, stating that many municipalities already use podcasts effectively, and Gahanna is behind in adopting this tool. She emphasized the podcast's potential for greater reach compared to traditional social media platforms, providing resources, highlighting local businesses, and sharing information about programs. She also noted the importance of using various communication methods to engage the City's diverse and multigenerational population, each of which consumes information differently.

President Bowers expressed interest in the podcast initiative but questioned how it would reach its target audience effectively, particularly business leaders, if it relied primarily on social media for distribution. Communications Manager Tia Ramey responded by explaining the City's multidimensional approach to engagement, which includes social media channels and email newsletters. She emphasized the importance of quality content and the potential for increased engagement through these platforms. President Bowers reiterated her concern, asking how the podcast would reach those not already engaged through social media. Ramey elaborated that the budget includes resources for expanding the city's YouTube channel, where the podcast content could also be uploaded. She explained that the podcast would be distributed across multiple platforms, including social media, email newsletters, and other digital tools, and emphasized the value of creating meaningful, engaging content.

Mayor Jadwin provided additional context by referencing a successful example of a podcast from Bellefontaine's Small Nation, which uses its platform to highlight local business owners and community opportunities. She noted that podcasts can be disseminated in various ways, including email distribution and multiple digital platforms, to ensure broad accessibility. Ramey added that the City would leverage YouTube Shorts, Facebook Reels, and Instagram Reels by creating micro-messages from the podcast content. These shorter clips would help maximize

engagement and ensure the content reached diverse audiences.

President Bowers inquired about increasing accessibility for individuals with disabilities and providing translations for diverse languages. Mayor Jadwin acknowledged that ADA compliance was a priority and referenced the City's new website introduced the previous year. She noted ongoing discussions with other municipalities and internally with Senior Director of Operations Kevin Schultz to address these issues. However, there was currently no specific budget allocation for these efforts, as the city was still assessing its needs.

Director Schultz explained that the City had requested an ADA compliance report from Civic Plus, the vendor responsible for the City's website and several associated platforms, such as NextRequest. The report would evaluate the compliance status of the City's website and related tools. Schultz noted that while Civic Plus is generally ADA-conscious, a formal assessment is necessary to understand the current compliance level. He emphasized that addressing ADA compliance involves multiple platforms and departments and is a complex, collaborative effort.

President Bowers expressed her opinion that accessibility should be a priority and suggested staff time be allocated accordingly. Schultz agreed, noting that the process would involve IT projects, resource allocation, and potential platform changes based on the assessment results. Mayor Jadwin added that the issue would require collaboration between the Council Office and the administration as improvements are implemented.

Councilmember Jones shared suggestions regarding the proposed podcast initiative, emphasizing opportunities for leveraging LinkedIn and considering podcast use for internal development purposes. She asked if the \$15,000 allocated was for startup costs and whether it would recur. Mayor Jadwin clarified that the allocation covers the production of six podcasts in a trial year, produced by a local Gahanna business. The initiative's continuation would depend on its success, with potential evaluation of equipment purchases or other approaches to improve efficiency.

Vice President Weaver asked for follow-up on the ADA compliance report once it had been reviewed. Schultz confirmed that discussions had already begun in response to previous public comments about accessibility issues with platforms such as Granicus. Weaver expressed appreciation for the updates and anticipated further information.

Councilmember McGregor questioned the metrics for podcast success. Communications Manager Tia Ramey explained that metrics such as listens, video views, and shares would be key indicators. She projected a 25% increase in video views as a goal for the first year. McGregor asked for clarification on numerical targets, and Ramey emphasized the need to base projections on existing analytics, with a focus on expanding content reach and engagement.

Councilmember Padova sought clarification on the podcast format and distribution. Ramey explained that the content would be uploaded to the City's YouTube channel and distributed through social media and email newsletters. Padova expressed understanding and noted that this approach differed from her initial expectations of podcasts available on traditional platforms like Apple Podcasts or Google Podcasts. Mayor Jadwin added that cities like Upper Arlington and Reynoldsburg also produce similar content, though not all use live formats.

President Bowers asked if multiple bids had been sought for the podcast production. Mayor Jadwin confirmed that three quotes were obtained, consistent with the City's procurement process, and the lowest bid would be selected.

Councilmember Jones suggested that it would be helpful to receive periodic Council updates on communications metrics, such as follower increases and engagement trends, to better inform future budget discussions. Mayor Jadwin agreed, noting that some metrics had already been shared in Director Vollmer's earlier presentation, and future updates would include comparisons to better reflect progress and proposals.

Crisis Communications

Director Vollmer addressed a question regarding the \$20,000 allocated for crisis communication and whether these responsibilities could be absorbed internally. She explained that this amount is budgeted annually as an emergency fund to engage an outside consultant in the event of an urgent or emergency situation that internal staff cannot manage or is beyond their expertise. As an example, Director Vollmer referenced the use of an external crisis communication firm to assist the City in responding to First Amendment auditors. She emphasized that this fund is reserved for unplanned and urgent situations, where immediate and professional communication is required, either internally or with residents.

Councilmember Jones inquired whether the fund is always utilized. Director Vollmer clarified that it is not always used.

Streaming on Facebook or Instagram Live

Director Vollmer addressed a question about whether the City had considered live streaming on Facebook or Instagram Live. She explained that the City had not pursued this option, noting that YouTube, as the largest streaming platform, remains the preferred platform for meetings, interviews, and podcasts.

Councilmember Padova suggested that live streaming on additional platforms could increase engagement by sending notifications to followers when events go live, potentially encouraging more residents to participate in town halls, Council meetings, and other events. Padova inquired about the technical requirements and whether this had been explored.

Director Schultz confirmed that the City's existing equipment could technically support live streaming on multiple platforms, but further testing would be required to evaluate potential issues. He noted that increasing the number of streaming platforms could introduce technical complications, such as disruptions to the current setup. Schultz stated that the City's focus has been on directing residents to YouTube, given its broad reach and established reliability.

Communications Manager Tia Ramey expressed concerns about managing comments and responsiveness across multiple platforms. She explained that streaming on multiple platforms could require additional manpower to address comments during live events, which might exceed the current team's capacity. Ramey noted that as a new staff member was starting soon, the department could reevaluate this in the future.

President Bowers clarified that comments are currently turned off on YouTube streams and asked whether similar settings could be implemented on Facebook Live. Schultz acknowledged that this would need to be explored and that turning off comments on platforms like Facebook could mitigate potential challenges, such as the issues experienced during crisis communication events. He emphasized the importance of assessing the implications further before proceeding.

Chairman Schnetzer asked Clerk VanMeter about records management concerns related to streaming on multiple platforms. Clerk VanMeter explained that the City uses a CivicPlus product called Archive Social to archive content from its social media accounts. While this system captures posts and changes over time, the management of live video streams and their associated comments may present additional

challenges. VanMeter indicated that these considerations would need to be reviewed to ensure proper records retention and management.

Director Vollmer provided an overview of the City's social media accounts, which include five Facebook accounts (City, Parks and Recreation, Police Department, Creekside, and Gahanna 175), three X (formerly Twitter) accounts (City, Parks and Recreation, and Police Department), two Instagram accounts, one LinkedIn account, and a YouTube channel.

Director Schultz and Mayor Jadwin clarified the management of the Creekside Gahanna Facebook page. Schultz noted that the Creekside District Alliance had previously requested and been granted limited access to the page for promotional purposes but that the City has retained overall management of the page. Mayor Jadwin confirmed that the page was initially created by the City and remains under its control.

Administrative Services

Director Vollmer provided an overview of the Administrative Services section, highlighting 2024 achievements primarily in the areas of risk and safety. She noted that a new position was added in 2024, focusing on implementing a CDL training program that meets federal regulations. The City increased training for staff on first aid, AED, and CPR, with nine outdoor AED cabinets currently being installed at athletic fields. Additional training initiatives included hands-on equipment training, distracted driver training, and confined space training. The department onboarded two new employees, an administrative coordinator and a management analyst for grants, and hired a benefits consultant to review employee benefits.

For 2025, Director Vollmer outlined priorities, including continuing the employee health insurance and related benefits process by issuing an RFP for all lines of coverage with the City's partners at NFP. The City plans to update the chemical inventory by conducting audits, perform job hazard analyses for all City positions, and implement a new software system for property and liability insurance. Other planned actions include updating emergency action plans for all City buildings, including the new municipal complex.

Director Vollmer addressed questions about the management analyst position for grants and the return on investment, noting that the employee had been in the role for approximately 100 days and was still undergoing onboarding and training with Senior Director Wybensing. The employee had begun meeting with staff to understand departmental

needs and funding opportunities and had attended several trainings on grant identification and application processes. In response to a question regarding past grant funding to nonprofits, Director Vollmer stated that the City had provided grants to nonprofits using CARES Act funds as part of COVID-19 recovery efforts in 2020. However, these were federal funds, and the City has not used other sources for nonprofit grant programs.

President Bowers inquired about any historical tax dollar funding directly allocated to nonprofits outside of grant programs, such as earmarked funds or donations. Director Bury stated that she was not aware of any instances during her tenure. She added that while the City hosts donation drives for programs like Gahanna Residents in Need (GRIN), no tax dollars have been used for donations or grant programs.

Councilmember McGregor recalled a \$1,000 grant that was provided in the past to support the construction of a memorial at the high school. She explained that the project, led by architectural students, involved fundraising efforts. Mayor Jadwin asked for clarification on whether the funding went to the schools as a political entity, but Councilmember McGregor was unsure how the funding was allocated or managed.

2025 Staffing Requests

Director Vollmer provided additional clarification regarding the training coordinator position, which had been discussed throughout the budget process. She explained that the position is 50% funded through Administrative Services, with reporting responsibilities aligned under the Senior Deputy Director of Administrative Services. She referred to the organizational chart, noting that the position is listed as a Priority 2.

Economic Development

Director Vollmer provided an overview of the Economic Development Department, highlighting its achievements in 2024. These included supporting business attraction and growth, with examples such as the opening of Orthopedic One, new construction projects like Burns and Scalo, and the business expansion of Crocodile Cloth. The department also strengthened collaboration with partner organizations to identify and enhance opportunities for business growth and support. Additionally, process improvements were made for Community Reinvestment Area (CRA) tracking, reporting, and accountability.

For 2025, the department plans to complete a refresh of the 2015 Economic Development Strategy as part of the broader "Our Gahanna"

strategic and economic development plan. Other priorities include advancing the Creekside Redevelopment project, identifying opportunities for business attraction and expansion, and assisting in strengthening the talent pipeline to support the workforce needs of local businesses both now and in the future.

Director Vollmer presented the expenditures and revenue slides for the Economic Development Department, noting that a variety of questions had been submitted regarding these areas. She explained that the first set of questions would be addressed by Mayor Jadwin. Vollmer would take the second set, which pertained to the staffing of the Economic Development Director position.

Relationship with Creekside District Alliance & Creekside Outdoor Refreshment Area (CORA)

Mayor Jadwin addressed a question regarding the Economic Development Department's relationship with the Creekside District Alliance (CDA). She explained that the CDA is a 501(c)(3) organization that was established between 2016 and 2019, noting her involvement as an original board member. The CDA is currently undergoing a transition, with its existing board members evaluating the organization's future role and how it best fits within the Creekside District. During this transition, the CDA approached the Economic Development Department to assume responsibility for managing the Creekside Outdoor Refreshment Area (CORA), citing their limited capacity to handle it. This request was made while Director Hamons was still with the City, and the department agreed to take on the oversight. Since then, the Economic Development Department has implemented new processes, including streamlined tracking and cup ordering for participating businesses. At present, this constitutes the extent of the relationship between the Economic Development Department and the CDA. The department is also collaborating with the Marketing and Communications team to promote CORA, with plans to enhance marketing efforts for both the winter season and the upcoming spring kickoff.

The Mayor also discussed plans for the CORA, noting that 2024 will mark its fifth year, necessitating its renewal by City Council. As part of this process, the City will seek a slight expansion of the CORA boundary to the north to include the area where the popular Creekside Boutique Hops, hosted by the Fable Collection, are held. Currently, this area is outside the CORA boundary, creating confusion for participants. The expansion is intended to address this issue and support the growing popularity of the event. Additionally, the Mayor outlined plans to adjust the CORA's operating hours for consistency. Currently, hours vary on

weekends versus weekdays, which participating businesses have found challenging for staffing. The proposal would standardize the operating hours to 11:00 a.m. to 11:00 p.m. daily. The renewal and proposed adjustments will be brought to Council for consideration in the first quarter of 2025 to ensure readiness for the spring event season.

In response to a question from President Bowers, Mayor Jadwin confirmed that there would be no cost associated with these changes.

City's Incentive Portfolio (Community Reinvestment Agreements, Office & Industrial Program, etc.)

Mayor Jadwin addressed a question regarding the competitiveness of the City's incentive portfolios, including CRAs and other economic development tools, compared to neighboring Central Ohio cities. She acknowledged that this area presents opportunities for improvement and stated that the City may not be as well-positioned as some other communities. A recurring issue has been the lack of clarity around the school compensation agreement, which she identified as a key factor to address in partnership with the school district to create a clearer and more specific agreement.

President Bowers inquired whether reviewing the incentive portfolio would be a strategic goal for the incoming Economic Development Director. Mayor Jadwin responded that this review would be incorporated into the "Our Gahanna" strategic plan and the refresh of the Economic Development Strategy. The consultant engaged for the strategic plan will evaluate the City's incentives, compare them to those of other communities, and provide recommendations for growth or innovation. President Bowers expressed interest in better understanding the City's use of pre-1994 CRAs, noting the importance of evaluating whether they remain the best tools or if refinements to the City's toolbox could yield better results. Mayor Jadwin agreed, emphasizing the importance of assessing how Gahanna compares to neighboring communities, particularly given the region's growth and competition. She highlighted the inclusion of Julie Colley, a highly respected Economic Development professional and former deputy director from Westerville, as part of the Planning Next consulting team, and expressed optimism about the insights she could bring to the process.

Chairman Schnetzer asked about the expected output of the Planning Next team with respect to economic development tools, particularly addressing the school compensation agreement. Director Vollmer explained that the economic development portion of the strategic plan is still in its early stages, currently focused on data collection and business

engagement. The plan involves engaging a specific number of businesses to gather input, with goals and objectives to be developed as part of the process. The final plan will include a comparative assessment of Gahanna's incentive tools against peer communities and recommendations for enhancing the City's incentive portfolio. The completed strategy is expected to be presented to the Council in fall 2025, with updates provided along the way. Chairman Schnetzer sought clarification on how deficiencies identified in the assessment would be addressed, particularly if recommendations require action beyond the City's control. Director Vollmer stated that recommendations would be discussed with the consultant during the development phase and presented to Council for consideration prior to finalizing the plan. She added that the Economic Development Director would play a central role in evaluating and implementing recommendations that best suit the community. Mayor Jadwin affirmed that the director would be closely involved in these efforts and in presenting proposals to the Council.

Gahanna Minority Business Enterprise Program

Mayor Jadwin provided details regarding the Gahanna Minority Business Enterprise Program. She clarified that the program would not involve a formal set-aside funding model but would focus on connecting with minority-owned, women-owned, and veteran-owned businesses to understand their needs and challenges. The goal is to identify opportunities for the City to coordinate and facilitate partnerships and relationships, leveraging resources from state, county, and other external organizations. The Mayor described the City's role as that of a connector, likening it to "match.com" for businesses-helping to link businesses with resources and opportunities that could support their growth. The program would emphasize augmenting existing resources and fostering connectivity to provide support tailored to the needs of minority businesses. Mayor Jadwin noted that the costs associated with the program would be relatively limited, covering items such as printed materials, communications, and potential events conducted in partnership with other organizations. These events would aim to connect minority businesses with additional resources and networking opportunities.

Chairman Schnetzer jokingly inquired about the possibility of having Marlow's Cheesesteaks delivered for late-night meetings. Mayor Jadwin noted that the business may have been closed at that hour. She emphasized the importance of supporting and retaining successful local businesses like Marlow's Cheesesteaks, highlighting their growth throughout Central Ohio and the city's commitment to helping them expand and thrive in Gahanna.

Partnering with Marketing & Communications

Mayor Jadwin addressed a question regarding the proposed budget's reference to partnering with the Marketing and Communications Department to help market the city. She began by highlighting several initiatives already discussed, such as podcasts and promoting Creekside. She explained that the Marketing and Communications team and the Economic Development team meet regularly to strategize ways to enhance engagement with the business community and attract new businesses to the area. The collaboration includes analyzing data, such as visitor metrics from events, to better understand attendance patterns, origins of visitors, and their duration of stay. The teams also gather feedback from business partners to inform strategies and leverage existing resources from both departments to maximize impact. Examples of potential initiatives include placing ads in Columbus Business First and creating business spotlights to promote local enterprises through the City's website and social media channels. Mayor Jadwin further described the creation of materials that can be distributed during business visits. These branded folders include information about the city, such as school reports, funding reports, and opportunities for volunteering and community engagement. These efforts aim to strengthen connections with the business community and showcase the advantages of doing business in Gahanna to audiences outside the City.

Economic Development Staffing

Director Vollmer provided updates on the Economic Development Department staffing and budget. She reported that the search for a new Economic Development Director was ongoing, with the position currently posted on the City's website for a total of 30 days. Additional recruiting resources, exceeding those used for other city positions, were allocated for advertising the role on platforms such as IEDC, OEDA, OhioMeansJobs, LinkedIn, and other statewide organizations, as well as on GovernmentJobs.com. On the topic of contract services, Vollmer explained that the planned decrease in this line item reflects the one-time funds appropriated in 2024 for the refresh of the Economic Development Strategy. Regarding the Montrose Group, she noted that their services are budgeted annually at \$60,000, the same as in 2024. Vollmer also confirmed that the 2025 budget includes salaries and benefits for a new Economic Development Director, budgeted for the full year starting January 1.

Vice President Weaver asked about the value an Economic Development Director would provide compared to a consultant like the

Montrose Group. Mayor Jadwin responded that having a dedicated director would offer the critical advantage of knowing the business community and building ongoing relationships, which consultants cannot replicate. She emphasized the importance of continuing to use consultants for highly specialized expertise, such as securing demolition grants, which the Montrose Group has successfully done. Mayor Jadwin highlighted the collaborative benefits of maintaining both a director and external consultants to achieve comprehensive economic development goals.

Capital Requests

Director Vollmer transitioned the discussion to the capital section, where Director Schultz outlined the equipment portion of the capital budget, totaling \$2.4 million. Schultz explained that most of the funds come from the Capital Improvement Fund, with \$500,000 specifically allocated for health and wellness equipment and furnishings at 825 Tech Center Drive.

Director Vollmer elaborated that the \$500,000 comes from a dividend payment the City is set to receive from the Central Ohio Health Care Consortium (COHCC). The consortium, which reviews its excess reserve policies, determined that Gahanna's strong performance over the past five years qualifies it for a return of funds. Vollmer explained that these funds were allocated for employee health and wellness initiatives, including health and wellness equipment, contributions to the OSU Wellness Center, HSA contributions, and the city's wellness programming.

Chairman Schnetzer asked for clarification on whether the \$500,000 allocation listed on page 115 of the budget was under the Finance Department. Director Vollmer confirmed this.

Discussion on Section 7 of the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP): City Facilities

Director Schultz presented Section 7 of the CIP, which focuses on City Facilities. The total requested allocation for this section was \$450,000, broken down into \$300,000 from the Capital Improvement Fund and \$150,000 from the General Fund. Schultz noted that significant projects, such as 825 Tech Center Drive, were fully funded in 2024, contributing to the relatively small 2025 request. Schultz outlined the three projects included in this section. The \$300,000 allocation from the Capital Improvement Fund was designated for strategic land acquisition for development. He acknowledged previous discussions in the Council Chambers regarding this allocation and explained that the funds are

intended to support the CIC (Community Improvement Corporation) under the existing agreement between the City and the CIC.

Clarification and Concerns Regarding CIC Funding Allocation

President Bowers expressed support for renaming the project for greater clarity. Chairman Schnetzer asked whether using Capital Improvement Fund dollars for land acquisition intended for economic development was appropriate, suggesting the General Fund might be a more suitable source. Director Bury confirmed that using the Capital Improvement Fund for such purposes was technically permissible and aligned with the intent of the land bank program to revitalize blighted areas for community betterment.

President Bowers raised concerns about the \$300,000 allocation being used predominantly for servicing existing CIC-owned parcels rather than for new acquisitions. She referenced prior discussions and public statements regarding the costs and potential recovery of funds for land in the Creekside area, expressing doubt that the funds would be recouped as initially hoped. Mayor Jadwin suggested discussing the matter further in an executive session to avoid impacting ongoing negotiations. Schultz provided additional context, noting that some CIC-owned properties, such as those near Stygler Road and Agler Road, could directly benefit future public projects like traffic reconfigurations. He emphasized that while funds may be used for various purposes depending on the project, they still provide strategic value to the city.

President Bowers and Chairman Schnetzer highlighted the need to distinguish between the technical permissibility of using the Capital Improvement Fund and the appropriateness of doing so. Schnetzer suggested that, given the purpose of servicing CIC properties, the General Fund might align better with the intended use. Bowers proposed requesting a report from the CIC to clarify how the 2024 allocation was utilized and what the 2025 allocation is expected to fund.

Mayor Jadwin affirmed the importance of transparency in how these funds are used and supported renaming the project to reflect its purpose more accurately. She reiterated that the CIC's role is to manage properties for redevelopment opportunities that benefit the community, acknowledging delays in realizing these outcomes.

The Council agreed to revisit the item at a subsequent meeting. Vice President Weaver volunteered to contact CIC colleagues to gather more information on the intended use of funds and provide a report. Chairman Schnetzer emphasized that the discussion hinges on Council's comfort

level with the funding source and its alignment with the CIC's activities. The matter will be reviewed further to ensure alignment between the budget, Council expectations, and the CIC's operational plans.

Discussion on Parks and Service Maintenance Complex

Director Schultz presented an update on the Parks and Service Maintenance Complex. He explained that two recently added items, not included in the initial budget book, propose allocating funds for continued efforts to address the aging streets and utilities complex. Schultz outlined the status of the project and the challenges faced in identifying a suitable location for a new or reimagined facility. In the current calendar year, the City investigated three potential properties for the complex, including one City-owned property on Taylor Road and two privately-owned industrial properties. The Taylor Road property was determined to be cost-prohibitive for development due to wetland delineation findings. One of the industrial properties was deemed unviable due to inadequate land assembly, and the other was involved in a separate development proposal. Schultz proposed allocating \$100,000 from the General Fund to conduct site investigations and planning for the current facility's location or other potential properties. This funding would support feasibility studies, site evaluations, and preliminary design work to determine how the existing property or other sites could be utilized for a modernized facility. He emphasized that while some of the funding may not be fully utilized, it would provide flexibility to investigate additional opportunities as they arise. Schultz acknowledged that this item should have been included in the original budget and apologized for the oversight.

Chairman Schnetzer sought clarification on previous discussions regarding the project, recalling earlier workshoping sessions where the lack of available 10- to 12-acre parcels within city limits was identified as a key challenge. Schultz confirmed that the scarcity of suitable land within Gahanna has necessitated consideration of alternative solutions, including potential redesigns of the current facility. He noted that the increasing development pressure on larger parcels has also contributed to higher costs, potentially adding \$2 to \$3 million to the project if a larger property were pursued. Schnetzer asked for clarification about the characterization of one industrial property as "unappealing." Schultz explained that the issue with that property was insufficient land assembly, which rendered the site unsuitable for the City's needs.

Discussion on the Future of 200 S. Hamilton Road Facilities

Director Schultz provided an update on plans related to the City property

at 200 S. Hamilton Road. He explained that \$50,000 has been allocated in the proposed budget for planning purposes, which could include appraisals, development plans, or contractual studies to evaluate potential future uses for the property. Schultz clarified that while no immediate plans exist for the \$50,000 allocation, the funding would allow the City to proactively plan for redevelopment or disposition of the property.

Vice President Weaver inquired about the ongoing efforts to inventory and salvage items from the current facility for reuse at 825 Tech Center Drive. Schultz confirmed that he and MSA are working to identify reusable assets, such as desks and specialized equipment, to transition to the new building. Schultz also noted that logistical planning is underway to coordinate the move of multiple facilities and departments to the new location. He mentioned that the existing 2024 budget includes a modest \$50,000 allocation for moving expenses, though additional funding might be required as plans develop. Weaver expressed appreciation for the efforts to repurpose items with a remaining useful life and acknowledged the ongoing work by Schultz and MSA to ensure a smooth transition.

Chairman Schnetzer raised a question about the timing of the property's disposition and whether it might align with the outputs of the economic development strategy currently being developed by Planning Next. Director Vollmer and Mayor Jadwin responded that the evaluation of 200 S. Hamilton Road is not part of the scope of the economic development strategy scope of services. The Mayor explained that the strategy is focused on broader goals such as business attraction, growth, housing needs, and updating the City's incentive toolkit to remain competitive. Mayor Jadwin emphasized that evaluating the immediate future of 200 S. Hamilton Road would be a specific and more immediate project. She suggested that this task might align better with Director Blackford's priorities for the upcoming year, which include reviewing and potentially updating the City's land use plan in light of the new zoning code. She noted that such an evaluation could play a significant role in determining the best future use of the property.

Chairman Schnetzer noted the City's parcel as a prominent location on South Hamilton and the public interest in future use that it would likely generate. He suggested that incorporating input from external consultants could help provide a clear evaluation and options for maximizing the return on investment (ROI) for the City and its residents.

Mayor Jadwin agreed with the suggestion, emphasizing the importance of involving outside expertise to evaluate the property and provide

recommendations. She stated that these evaluations would be crucial in presenting informed options to both the Administration and Council for further consideration.

Next Steps

Chairman Schnetzer asked Councilmembers if they wished to engage in additional deliberations on the budget or preferred to wait until the next meeting on December 2. Vice President Weaver suggested that identifying areas of concern during the current meeting could be helpful for the administration to prepare additional information. Weaver noted concerns about the appropriateness of funding for a facilities superintendent position, questioning its timing relative to other priorities.

Councilmember Jones expressed concerns about the number of consultants contracted by the City and whether all were necessary. She indicated that while she recognized a reduction in consultant requests compared to 2024, she intended to review the need for each consultant and assess opportunities to consolidate or reduce these expenditures.

President Bowers highlighted the importance of ensuring adequate time for Council deliberation at the December 2 meeting. She suggested limiting any follow-up presentations from the Administration to allow sufficient time for discussion. Director Vollmer responded, noting the Administration would provide additional information on the parks manager position, facilities superintendent, and CIC-related expenditures. She requested that Councilmembers submit specific questions or requests for clarification as soon as possible, preferably before Monday at 9:00 a.m., to allow time to prepare responses given the upcoming holiday.

Councilmember McGregor voiced concerns about the \$100,000 grant program for nonprofits, questioning its alignment with Issue 12 and suggesting it may not be an appropriate use of taxpayer funds. President Bowers indicated she would be prepared to discuss her opinion on this issue further at the next meeting.

Chairman Schnetzer summarized the key areas of focus for the December 2 meeting, including staffing considerations, consultant expenditures, and specific line-item concerns. He encouraged Councilmembers to submit any additional questions by Tuesday night for submission to the Administration. The Council agreed to proceed with current plans to deliberate on the budget during the December 2 meeting, with a contingency for scheduling a special meeting if needed before December 9. Chairman Schnetzer emphasized the importance of

focusing discussions on actionable items and reaching a consensus on a budget that can pass on December 16.

Recommendation: Public Hearing on City Council Regular Agenda and Introduction/First Reading on Regular Agenda on 12.2.2024; Further Discussion scheduled in Finance Committee 12.2.2024.

C. ADJOURNMENT:

With no further business before the Finance Committee, the Chair adjourned the meeting at 10:11 p.m.

Jeremy A. VanMeter
Clerk of Council

*APPROVED by the Finance Committee, this
day of 2024.*

Michael Schnetzer