



City of Gahanna

Meeting Minutes

Charter Review

200 S. Hamilton Road
Gahanna, Ohio 43230

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 14, 2026

7:30 PM

Council Chambers, City Hall

Special Meeting

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

Chair Ethan Barnhardt called the special meeting of the Gahanna Charter Review Commission to order on Thursday, May 14, 2026, at 7:30 p.m. and led members in the Pledge of Allegiance. The agenda was published on Monday, May 11, 2026.

Present 6 - Ethan Barnhardt, Jamie Belisle, Richard Maxwell, Raymond J. Mularski, Karen Reynolds, and Carrin Wester

Absent 1 - Edward A. Hill Jr.

B. ADDITIONS OR CORRECTIONS TO THE AGENDA.

None.

C. PUBLIC COMMENT.

None.

D. UNFINISHED BUSINESS.

1. Proposal Inventory Review and Deliberation

[2026-0050](#)

Draft Charter Amendment Proposals for Charter Review Commission 2026

Appointed City Attorney Proposal

Chair Barnhardt opened the Charter Commission's discussion, reintroducing the possibility of implementing an appointment process

rather than an election for the position of the City Attorney of Gahanna. Chair Barnhardt asked whether the Commission wished to continue deliberations or table the matter.

Mr. Mularski described the matter as a significant undertaking that required additional information and further consideration.

Ms. Reynolds stated that converting the position from an elected to an appointed position felt unusual. She observed Gahanna voters currently elect the city attorney, and such a change would remove direct voter involvement. She also noted that discussion regarding a possible city manager form of government related to the broader implications of changing the city attorney structure.

Mr. Maxwell inquired about Mr. Mularski's previous experience in running for the City Attorney of Gahanna.

Mr. Mularski discussed the independence of the city attorney position, stating that an elected city attorney created a system similar to the separation of powers in the federal government. The city attorney answers directly to voters rather than another branch of government. He also stated that the city attorney position involved a relatively small pool of eligible attorneys because compensation remained low and the role required balancing city attorney responsibilities with private legal work.

Chair Barnhardt asked whether the city attorney position constituted a part-time role or whether compensation created that perception.

Current Gahanna City Attorney Tamilarasan clarified that city ordinance designated the position as full-time employment including benefits, with the Charter specifically permitting the city attorney to maintain a private legal practice. The Chair asked whether the city imposed a required number of weekly working hours and how the city attorney balanced private practice responsibilities with official duties. City Attorney Tamilarasan reviewed the applicable code provisions, explaining that City Council established the position as full-time effective January 2, 2020, setting compensation through ordinance. She stated that neither the Charter nor city ordinances established specific work hours or schedules, although both documents enumerated the duties of the office. She reiterated that the Charter expressly allowed the city attorney to

maintain a private practice.

Chair Barnhardt inquired with both the current City Attorney, Tamilarasan, and the previous City Attorney, Commissioner Mularski, about the practical balance between private legal practice and service as the city attorney for Gahanna. City Attorney Tamilarasan stated that she treated the city attorney position as her primary responsibility and only accepted private cases in her spare time. She explained that she scheduled private court appearances around her meetings and obligations to the City. Mr. Mularski stated that he initially attempted to divide his time evenly between private practice and city attorney duties but found that arrangement unworkable.

Chair Barnhardt then invited City Attorney Tamilarasan to provide additional context regarding the proposal to convert the city attorney position from elected to appointed. City Attorney Tamilarasan stated that she reviewed much of the previous meeting discussion and believed the issue related primarily to checks and balances within the City of Gahanna government structure. She explained that an elected city attorney answered directly to voters and maintained an independent duty to the city that remained separate from obligations to either the city council or the mayor. She stated that this independence became particularly important during conflicts between branches of government because the city attorney needed to act in the best interests of the city rather than any appointing authority. City Attorney Tamilarasan stated that the structure of the city attorney's position closely related to the city's form of government. She explained that most comparable suburbs with strong mayor forms of government also employed city administrators and retained elected law directors. She noted that the City of Bexley represented an exception, explaining Bexley's smaller population distinguished it from Gahanna. City Attorney Tamilarasan also discussed what the financial impact would be for converting the position to an appointed role. She stated that many municipalities with appointed law directors relied heavily on outside law firms and maintained significantly larger legal department budgets. She cited several examples, including Grove City's budget at approximately \$821,000, the City of Westerville at approximately \$1.1 million, the City of Dublin at approximately \$2.1 million, and the City of Hilliard at approximately \$1.2 million. She stated that population size appeared to correlate more strongly with legal department spending than with the overall operating budgets. She further

noted that Hilliard maintained a lower total operating budget than Gahanna, while still spending substantially more on legal services.

Vice Chair Wester asked whether City Attorney Tamilarasan possessed budget percentages in addition to raw budget figures. City Attorney Tamilarasan stated that she had annual budget figures and legal department totals but not percentages. She reiterated that comparable municipalities spent substantially more on legal services, especially when contracting with outside law firms.

City Attorney Tamilarasan also emphasized the importance of community ties for the city attorney position. She stated that residency requirements ensured loyalty and accountability to the community. She referenced Grove City's use of an outside law firm and noted that the appointed law director resided in the City of Dublin rather than Grove City. She stated that such arrangements conflicted with the commission's stated values regarding community involvement and local representation. City Attorney Tamilarasan concluded by questioning what specific problem the proposed change sought to solve. She observed that the commission had not identified evidence that Gahanna lacked qualified candidates for the elected position. She further noted that the Charter already provided mechanisms for appointments in the event of vacancies. She explained that city council possessed authority to appoint a replacement city attorney if a vacancy occurred and that the mayor could make the appointment if the council failed to act within thirty days.

City Attorney Tamilarasan introduced a prepared a redlined version of the city attorney's section of Charter, offering to review it with the commission at the appropriate time. Chair Barnhardt asked a follow-up question regarding legal service expenditures in comparable communities. He noted that many communities with appointed city attorneys also employed assistant city attorneys and contracted for additional outside legal services. He asked how Gahanna's legal spending compared. City Attorney Tamilarasan responded that the city attorney salary totaled approximately \$80,765. She stated that the total legal department budget equaled \$500,588, which included one full-time staff member and approximately \$250,000 allocated for contracted legal services. She explained that the city spent only approximately \$119,000 on outside counsel fees during the previous year despite the larger budget allocation. She further stated that municipalities with appointed

legal departments frequently spent amounts close to or exceeding their budgeted legal service projections, whereas Gahanna remained under budget for at least the previous three years. She added that Gahanna's total operating budget equaled approximately \$114 million. Chair Barnhardt asked whether City Attorney Tamilarasan could provide the commission with the financial information in writing. City Attorney Tamilarasan agreed.

Vice Chair Wester then asked City Attorney Tamilarasan when her current term would expire. City Attorney Tamilarasan stated that her current term ended January 1, 2028, and confirmed that she currently serves in her third year in office. Vice Chair Wester stated that the discussion largely reflected differing views regarding the structure of government. Wester explained that the Charter and city budget both treated the city attorney as a department head, stating support for maintaining public input in government. She observed that the city attorney position served a critically important role in an increasingly litigious and politically divided society. She expressed concern that elected offices were increasingly political and partisan at all levels of government, questioning the exposure of the city attorney's position to political influence. Ms. Wester clarified that no current or former city attorney created a problem requiring correction but argued that electing the position inherently introduced political influence. She asserted that converting the office to an appointed position would reduce political pressures.

Chair Barnhardt responded that council-mayor-administrator forms of government often placed administrators under the authority of city council and allowed those administrators to oversee multiple departments, including legal departments in some cases. He explained that such systems distributed authority differently, with administrators accountable to the city council while mayors retained oversight of specific operational areas such as finance and public safety. Chair Barnhardt elaborated that appointing the legal department through a mayoral appointment and council confirmation process could create conflicts because the legal department would likely become aligned with the mayor's day-to-day operations. He expressed concern that such a structure could encourage an increased political element. He stated that different forms of government distributed authority differently and required careful evaluation of how those power structures operated. Chair Barnhardt

cautioned against combining isolated elements of different governmental systems without fully considering long-term consequences. He also noted that some communities, such as the City of Bexley, developed unique governmental structures based on unique political cultures and history, questioning whether those systems would function effectively in Gahanna.

City Attorney Tamilarasan stated that Gahanna originally established the city attorney position as an appointed office when the Charter was first created. She explained that a conflict later arose involving the appointed structure, which ultimately led the City of Gahanna to convert the position to an elected office. She stated that returning to an appointed structure could recreate the same conflict. She explained this could prompt political maneuvering including removal efforts. She observed this could raise questions regarding whether the city attorney acted in the best interests of the City of Gahanna or an appointing authority.

Vice Chair Wester evaluated that the discussion confused the subject because the proposal only concerned whether the position should remain elected or become appointed. She stated that once someone occupied the office, the city attorney did not report directly to either the mayor or the council, regardless of how the attorney attained their position. She asked City Attorney Tamilarasan to explain the practical difference between the two systems and requested additional information regarding the referenced historical incident that caused Gahanna to transition from an appointed law director to an elected city attorney.

City Attorney Tamilarasan explained that an appointed attorney ultimately remained accountable to their appointing authority. She explained that despite independent legal authority, an appointed city attorney lacked complete independence because the appointing authority could remove the individual from office. She summarized the historical conflict, explaining the disagreement was between the mayor and the city council regarding the legal opinions of the appointed city attorney. One branch of government sought removal of the attorney while the other branch opposed removal, creating significant organizational tension. She identified former City Attorney Weber, as the individual who served as both the final appointed city attorney and first elected city attorney. She explained that the city later corrected the issue through Charter review by converting the office to an elected position so that similar conflicts would not arise again.

Mr. Maxwell confirmed the accuracy of City Attorney Tamilarasan's explanation regarding the city's history.

Vice Chair Wester observed that the discussion reflected personal opinions and acknowledged disagreement with some of Chair Barnhardt's comments. She clarified that the proposal did not represent a personal critique, asserting there was no wish to create conflict. She reiterated concern that increasing political division at all levels of government threatened the rule of law and stated that political influence over the city attorney position remained the central concern. Vice Chair Wester added that no current or former city attorney prompted the proposal and stated willingness to move on from the discussion if the commission did not wish to advance the idea further.

Chair Barnhardt stated that the discussion did not appear to show support for advancing the proposal. He expressed willingness to receive additional information if the discussion continued and stated that the proposal carried potential benefits. Chair Barnhardt stated that he personally wanted to review the information discussed regarding the city attorney proposal but did not believe the commission demonstrated support for advancing the matter. Vice Chair Wester then stated that no motion was necessary. Chair Barnhardt concluded that the commission would move on from the discussion because a motion was not offered.

Ward Representation Proposal

Chair Barnhardt transitioned discussion to ward structures and Council President Weaver's proposal regarding ward balancing. He stated that additional understanding of the process would assist the commission before making recommendations.

City Attorney Tamilarasan reported that the Board of Elections (BOE) advised her that ward balancing relied on population data rather than voter registration data. She stated that Dublin, Hilliard, and Grove City recently completed redistricting or ward rebalancing efforts. She explained that she reviewed those communities' charters and ward adjustment processes. City Attorney Tamilarasan stated that city councils generally approved ward maps after reviewing Geographic Information

System (GIS) data designed to balance ward populations. She explained that the BOE emphasized the importance of using census blocks and natural geographic boundaries when drawing ward lines because the board must subsequently establish precincts within each ward. She noted that precincts relied on voter data and could not exceed 1,400 voters each. She explained that the City of Gahanna previously submitted ward maps that failed to follow census block requirements, causing the BOE to reject the maps and require the process to restart. City Attorney Tamarasan stated that the city council would ultimately oversee any future ward balancing process using GIS and census data. She further explained that the Charter's reliance on voter registration data implied that ward balancing could occur every four years, although the city had not adjusted ward boundaries since approximately 2013. She noted that the city council discussed the matter in 2021 but did not pursue changes. She stated that the Charter did not require redistricting every four years, instead it established limitations on when changes could occur relative to ward elections. She stated that Dublin, Hilliard, Grove City, and Reynoldsburg all based ward balancing on population data and required review every ten years, following the release of census data. City Attorney Tamarasan explained that some communities triggered redistricting after reaching specific population growth percentages, while others required wards to remain within a five percent population variance. Communities exceeding those thresholds had to rebalance their districts. If the commission wanted to shift from voter registration data to population-based balancing, she recommended requiring redistricting every ten years to ensure the city relied on accurate census data. In conclusion, she noted the BOE would provide procedural guidance based on the desired outcome of the city.

Chair Barnhardt stated that municipalities in the region with ward systems generally used language based on residents or population rather than registered voters. He observed that Gahanna appeared to be the outlier in using voter registration data for ward balancing. City Attorney Tamarasan confirmed that she had not identified another municipality with ward representatives that based ward balancing on voter registration data.

Vice Chair Wester stated that the discussion should focus less on representation and more on how changing the standard could affect elections. She expressed concern about ensuring fair elections and

questioned what specific problem the proposal sought to solve. She acknowledged that other municipalities used population-based metrics; however, she stated that implementing such a change represented a significant undertaking. She questioned the value of relying on census data from 2020 in 2026 and asked what benefit justified making the change immediately.

City Attorney Tamilarasan acknowledged the proposal as a representation issue. Each ward representative serves the entire population within their district. She explained that balancing wards by population prevented disproportionate representation between wards. Most redistricting efforts aimed to ensure fair population representation. She suggested that earlier reliance on voter registration data likely reflected the availability of current data. She explained that, historically, Gahanna did not use voter registration data to rebalance wards. She observed most municipalities conduct rebalancing every ten years, following census data publication. City Attorney Tamilarasan summarized that the commission should consider whether utilizing voter registration data or population data better reflected the city's values. She advised this assessment was practical during the current Charter review cycle, noting the proximity to the next census assessment, anticipated in 2030. She explained the next Charter Review Commission would not convene until 2031. She elaborated that the election schedule for at-large council positions could delay any future redistricting process until 2032.

Vice Chair Wester interjected, clarifying concerns regarding the discussion. She stated appreciation for the information provided; however, she asserted that City Attorney Tamilarasan served as legal counsel to the commission and did not possess voting rights on the commission. She noted that the ward data submitted by the proposal's sponsor did not appear significantly imbalanced and stated that no ward represented a substantially disproportionate percentage of the city's population. She also disagreed with the suggestion that urgency existed to address the issue immediately and noted that the city council retained authority to amend ward maps independently of the Charter Review Commission process. City Attorney Tamilarasan responded that city council possessed authority to amend the Charter outside the Charter Review Commission process in the same way it could pursue any Charter amendment independently. Ms. Wester concluded by stating that the commission should avoid creating a false sense of urgency

surrounding the issue. She reiterated that the available ward data did not demonstrate severe imbalance and stated that the city council could address the matter independently in the future if population disparities became significant.

City Attorney Tamilarasan clarified that information provided did not reflect urgency, but was in response to questions regarding timing. She explained that the timing of the proposal did not appear stale or premature. If voters approved a Charter amendment immediately, the change would likely not take effect until after the next census.

Chair Barnhardt asked when Gahanna last completed ward redistricting or rebalancing. City Attorney Tamilarasan answered the city last redrew ward boundaries in 2013. Chair Barnhardt observed that the city therefore continued using ward information approximately thirteen or fourteen years old and stated that the Gahanna City Council appeared to have no obligation to rebalance wards unless it chose to do so. Mr. Mularski responded that the council would need to address ward boundaries if they became substantially imbalanced.

Ms. Reynolds stated that the proposal likely arose because of those concerns. Vice Chair Wester described available numbers as relatively even not demonstrating a significant imbalance. Ms. Reynolds stated that the commission should avoid dismissing difficult issues simply because they require substantial effort. She explained that the purpose of the Charter Review Commission involved evaluating potential changes even when those changes represented major undertakings. She suggested that the Charter could potentially require periodic review of ward data every four years, or another set interval, rather than immediately implementing major structural changes. Ms. Reynolds stated that the current data did not demonstrate serious imbalance but supported continued discussion regarding future review requirements.

Vice Chair Wester identified questions that remained unresolved, including whether all municipal charters addressed ward balancing and whether mandatory review intervals represented a common practice. She noted that the proposal itself acknowledged that the current data did not show statistically significant imbalance among the wards. Vice Chair Wester stated that if one ward appeared substantially out of balance, the proposal would warrant stronger consideration. However, based on the

available data, she assessed the wards currently appeared relatively balanced. She expressed concern regarding how possible changes could affect elections.

Mr. Mularski recalled that the city council reviewed the ward boundaries in either 2020 or 2021 and determined that a significant imbalance did not exist at that time. He stated that the lack of changes since 2013 did not mean the council ignored the issue. City Attorney Tamilarasan confirmed that the last ward boundaries were adopted in 2013 for use beginning with the 2017 election cycle. She stated that the city council revisited the issue in 2021 after receiving census data. She explained that committee minutes from August 23, 2021, reflected discussion regarding pending population-by-ward GIS data. She explained that city staff expressed intent to revisit the issue once GIS mapping became available; however, no action regarding redistricting had occurred. Mularski referenced earlier discussion regarding precincts and asked why the BOE based precinct sizes on voter counts. City Attorney Tamilarasan explained that the board limited precinct sizes to avoid overwhelming polling locations and noted that each precinct carried a maximum threshold of approximately 1,400 voters.

Chair Barnhardt asked whether commissioners had additional questions or concerns regarding ward balancing. He advised that the commission would revisit the issue during later drafting discussions. He noted that ward balancing represented the final major educational topic under consideration.

City Attorney Charter Section

City Attorney Tamilarasan reminded the commission that she previously distributed a redlined version of proposed Charter revisions related to the city attorney's section and stated that the commission had not addressed the document. Chair Barnhardt acknowledged that the commission had not reviewed the redlined document and invited City Attorney Tamilarasan to walk through the proposed changes for the commission's consideration. City Attorney Tamilarasan reviewed several proposed redline revisions to the city attorney section of the Charter and explained that many of the changes sought to improve consistency and clarify existing language. She stated that the Charter currently used the

term “qualified” when describing when a successor takes office and proposed clarifying that term to mean that the elected official took the oath of office.

City Attorney Tamilarasan discussed language concerning vacancies in the office of city attorney. She explained that the Charter currently stated that an appointed successor would serve until January 1 following the next regular municipal election, which conflicted with language elsewhere in the Charter establishing January 2 as the official start of the term. She proposed clarifying language to avoid a gap in service, when January 1 fell on a Saturday, and the organizational meeting occurred on Sunday, January 2. City Attorney Tamilarasan further explained that the Charter lacked guidance for situations in which a vacancy occurred after petition deadlines but before an election. She stated that in such circumstances, no candidate could appear on the upcoming ballot, potentially leaving the office filled by an appointee for an additional two years. She proposed language clarifying that a successor could serve until the next election, at which time a replacement could properly appear on the ballot. She shared that she did not feel strongly about changing the fifteen-month residency requirement for the city attorney. She expressed support for maintaining residency requirements, for consistency purposes. She noted that the current Charter required the city attorney to reside in the city for fifteen months immediately preceding the municipal general election and stated that her proposed language mirrored that standard.

City Attorney Tamilarasan supported streamlining conflict-of-interest language. She proposed language stating that officeholders could not hold any other public office or public employment that conflicted with the position during the officeholder’s term, as determined by the Charter or Ohio law. She stated that the same language could apply consistently to all officeholders.

City Attorney Tamilarasan explained that Commissioner Mularski identified a provision in Section 10.03 requiring the city attorney to “prepare” all contracts, bonds, and other instruments. She stated that, in practice, the office could not personally prepare every contract and proposed adding the phrase “or review” to reflect actual operations. She also proposed replacing outdated references to “secretaries and clerks” with the term “administrative professionals.”

City Attorney Tamilarasan identified additional cleanup changes involving grammar and terminology. She noted that the Charter referred to prosecutions before “such court,” even though the city prosecuted matters in multiple courts. She proposed clarifying the language to reference all courts where matters remained pending. She also proposed replacing outdated uses of “in” with “on” for consistency throughout the Charter.

City Attorney Tamilarasan discussed another proposed revision involving the city attorney’s obligation to defend city officials and employees in lawsuits arising from their official duties. She explained that current Charter language required city council to authorize such representation by ordinance or resolution. She stated that this requirement conflicted with the broader understanding that the city attorney served as general legal counsel for the City of Gahanna’s officers and employees acting within the scope of their employment. She therefore proposed removing the requirement for council’s authorization before the city attorney could represent officials such as the mayor or department heads.

City Attorney Tamilarasan proposed adding the mayor to the list of officials authorized to request oral or written opinions from the city attorney. She concluded by discussing the annual report requirement. She explained that the Charter currently required the city attorney to present an annual report at the organizational meeting each January, which created difficulties when a new city attorney had to report on the predecessor’s activities. She proposed moving the annual report to the final Regular Council meeting of the year so the outgoing city attorney could report on matters that occurred during the outgoing term.

Chair Barnhardt asked commissioners whether they had questions before proceeding. He stated that, aside from the residency requirement discussion, most of the proposed revisions represented administrative cleanup rather than substantive policy changes and therefore likely would not require separate ballot proposals. He stated that the ultimate decision rested with the group.

Ms. Reynolds stated that some of the proposed changes appeared more substantial and suggested that commissioners take time to review the materials carefully.

Chair Barnhardt agreed and stated that most of the proposed revisions appeared administrative in nature. He acknowledged that some provisions might carry more significance but stated that he did not believe any of the changes altered the powers or authority of the city attorney's office in a structural way.

Mr. Maxwell asked whether all of the proposed cleanup language would ultimately appear on the ballot for voter approval or whether some changes could occur administratively outside of the ballot process. Chair Barnhardt responded that any Charter amendments would still require voter approval. Mr. Maxwell commented that the proposed revisions included a large amount of material.

Chair Barnhardt stated that if the commission already intended to advance a Charter amendment involving the city attorney section, the commission should also consider making reasonable cleanup revisions that aligned the Charter language with current operational practices. He stated that he viewed such cleanup as beneficial so long as it did not substantially alter the powers or responsibilities of the office. Chair Barnhardt clarified that if a proposed revision materially changed the authority or structure of the office, he would consider that a separate proposal requiring careful review. However, he viewed most of the proposed revisions as administrative in nature. He referenced the residency requirement discussion stating that the proposed revisions reflected topics included in the commission's discussions and scoring matrix. He acknowledged that some commissioners may not have contemplated the additional detail contained in the redlined language when initially scoring the proposal.

Chair Barnhardt voiced agreement with the proposed change moving the city attorney's annual report from the first meeting of the year to the final meeting of the year, describing that revision as administrative cleanup. He also stated that if the commission chose to advance the proposal to the ballot, the commission should provide guidance to the city attorney regarding additional cleanup language that should accompany the proposed amendment.

Vice Chair Wester clarified that she originally viewed the cleanup language as a separate issue but now understood it as part of the broader proposal already under consideration. She noted that earlier

discussions primarily focused on Sections 10.01 and 10.02 and not necessarily on Section 10.03 or the broader administrative revisions City Attorney Tamilarasan proposed.

Chair Barnhardt responded that the additional language exceeded what commissioners initially contemplated during scoring but stated that he remained open to incorporating reasonable cleanup revisions into the draft proposal if the commission chose to proceed. Chair Barnhardt asked whether commissioners had additional questions before moving to the next portion of the agenda. A commissioner asked whether the revisions were officially being added. Chair Barnhardt responded that the commission would address that issue later during discussions of the specific proposal.

Ballot Proposal Scoring

Chair Barnhardt transitioned the meeting into substantive discussions regarding ballot proposal scoring. He stated that commissioners submitted their scoring sheets and thanked Commissioner Mularski for providing updated scoring information. He explained that he incorporated those revisions into the updated chart distributed to commissioners at their seats and stated that the chart represented the most current scoring totals. Chair Barnhardt stated that the commission would now begin substantive discussions regarding which proposed ballot measures should advance to drafting. He explained that he compiled multiple data presentations showing scoring trends and areas of consensus because he believed it was helpful for commissioners to identify which proposals scored the highest and where differing perspectives existed. Chair Barnhardt stated that the scoring data suggested five proposals rose to the top based on the Commission's matrix and scoring thresholds. He explained that those proposals appeared either to merit serious consideration or qualified as strong candidates for advancement. He identified the five highest-scoring proposals as: nonpartisan primary reform proposed by Commissioner Mularski; repeal of the Board of Zoning and Building Appeals.(BZBA) and transfer of its authority; expansion of nondiscrimination protections to align with Equal Employment Opportunity language; amendment of Charter review frequency and scope; and revisions to the administrative departments section to align the Charter with the structure voters approved in 2021. Chair Barnhardt stated that the top five proposals clearly exceeded the

threshold for serious consideration or strong candidacy based on the commission's scoring matrix. He explained that the remaining proposals scored lower and required additional deliberation, while a few scored low enough that the commission did not recommend them at that time. He asked to hear commissioners' reflections after reviewing the scoring totals and seeing the priorities reflected in the group's evaluations.

Commissioner Belisle stated that the Commission should discuss its overall strategy for advancing proposals to the ballot. She noted that the group frequently referenced "voter fatigue" and suggested the commission discuss whether it intended to reduce the number of proposals or whether commissioners opposed advancing all proposals to the ballot.

City Attorney Tamilarasan stated that it could help commissioners to see draft ballot language because it allowed the commission to evaluate proposals from the perspective of what voters would ultimately see. She stated that she was willing to draft all proposals the commission requested, so the commission could determine which proposals to advance.

Vice Chair Wester stated that Chair Barnhardt worked hard to create an objective scoring system and that commissioners generally agreed the matrix provided a fair way to evaluate proposals. She stated that the commission should discuss proposals warranting additional review but emphasized that the scoring process still mattered. She suggested separating the proposals into categories: top-scoring items that should proceed to drafting, low-scoring items that the commission could eliminate by vote, and middle-tier proposals that required further discussion. Vice Chair Wester specifically identified the strategic plan alignment proposal as an example of a proposal that generated mixed views and warranted more discussion. Vice Chair Wester stated that the leadership council terms proposal received a low score and expressed comfort with eliminating it if the commission agreed.

Commissioner Maxwell explained that some proposals contained multiple components that affected commissioner's scores. He referenced draft ballot measure five and stated that a commissioner disagreed with one component related to additional public notice requirements because the city already used several communication

methods. However, he stated that other portions of the proposal appeared more appropriate.

Ms. Reynolds stated that several proposals included portions a commissioner supported and portions a commissioner opposed. She suggested that the commission begin discussions by identifying specific elements within proposals that commissioners supported or opposed individually.

Mr. Maxwell stated that splitting apart certain proposals could make sense. He specifically referenced attendance-related language and stated that percentage-based attendance standards appeared more reasonable than strict absence counts. He explained that rigid attendance requirements could unfairly penalize members who missed meetings because of illness or unavoidable circumstances.

Chair Barnhardt stated that he agreed with Vice Chair Wester's earlier comments and believed the top five proposals demonstrated strong consensus among commissioners. He suggested that the commission focus additional deliberation on the middle-tier proposals, specifically proposals numbered 2, 11, 3, 8, 5, and 6. He also stated that he felt comfortable eliminating proposal number seven at least temporarily because it scored comparatively low.

Mr. Maxwell raised a question regarding the nondiscrimination protections proposal. He stated that while aligning Charter language with the city's current Equal Employment Opportunity policies made sense, future changes in protected classifications could quickly render the Charter outdated again. He then acknowledged that the city attorney would draft language first and that the commission could continue discussing those issues afterward. Chair Barnhardt confirmed that the commission would continue reflecting on the issue after reviewing drafted language.

Ms. Belisle asked for clarification regarding the Charter review frequency proposal and whether the commission previously agreed on a ten-year review cycle. Chair Barnhardt stated that the commission held substantive discussions on the issue during the prior meeting and that most commissioners appeared to support moving to a ten-year cycle. He acknowledged that Commissioner Hill recommended maintaining a

five-year review cycle in comments attached to his scoring sheet. However, Chair Barnhardt stated that the overall group discussion reflected a general consensus supporting a ten-year review interval because commissioners wanted to avoid frequent Charter amendments. He stated that the city attorney could draft language using a ten-year standard as the starting point while still allowing commissioners to revisit the issue later.

A motion was made by Wester, seconded by Maxwell, to direct the city attorney to proceed with drafting the top five proposals scored by the commission.

Discussion:

Commissioner Belisle asked whether it would be more efficient to direct City Attorney Tamilarasan to draft language for every proposal under consideration so the commission could evaluate all of the draft language at once. Mr. Mularski agreed that the approach had merit and noted that City Attorney Tamilarasan offered to draft all proposals, if requested. Members observed that the commission would likely eliminate at least one proposal based on prior discussions but questioned whether commissioners were creating unnecessary additional work by debating proposals before seeing draft language.

Commissioner Mularski stated that the chart appeared to include twelve grouped ballot measures but eighteen separate proposal items. Chair Barnhardt explained that several of the eighteen proposals addressed similar subject areas and could therefore combine into a single ballot measure even though they originated from separate submissions.

Vice Chair Wester suggested that the commission eliminate lower-scoring proposals rather than advance every proposal to drafting. She noted commissioners had already spent considerable time scoring the proposals and suggested that only proposals with sufficient support should advance unless new information emerged. She further stated that the top five proposals each represented relatively straightforward single-issue proposals, while some middle-tier proposals contained multiple components requiring further discussion before drafting.

Chair Barnhardt agreed and suggested that the commission proceed by formally advancing the top five proposals to drafting, eliminating proposal number seven regarding council leadership terms and voting procedures, and then spending the remainder of the meeting discussing the middle-tier proposals individually. He stated that the commission could then determine which components of those proposals should remain, which should be removed, and whether additional drafting should occur.

Chair Barnhardt clarified that the motion and second already on the floor applied only to the top five proposals.

The motion carried by the following vote:

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

Absent: 1 - Hill

A motion was made by Belisle, seconded by Mularski, to eliminate proposal number seven concerning council leadership terms and voting procedures. The motion carried by the following vote:

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

Absent: 1 - Hill

Strategic Plan Proposal

Chair Barnhardt stated that eleven proposals remained under consideration. He explained that the commission would now proceed proposal by proposal in scoring order and determine whether to direct City Attorney Tamilarasan to draft language for each proposal. He opened discussion on the strategic plan requirement proposal. He stated that the proposal received a range of scores from strong support to lower support and invited additional comments from commissioners.

Commissioner Belisle stated she was not in favor of incorporating the strategic plan into the Charter.

Vice Chair Wester stated that she reflected further on the strategic plan proposal while completing the scoring process. She explained that she did not oppose referencing a strategic plan within the Charter and believed that if any external document belonged in the Charter, the strategic plan made sense. However, she expressed concern about requiring updates to the strategic plan within the Charter itself.

Chair Barnhardt clarified that the proposal involved embedding a strategic planning requirement in the Charter, while leaving the precise language to the drafting process. He explained that a strategic plan functions primarily as a guiding document and that actual implementation remains the responsibility of the city administration.

Commissioner Reynolds stated that she still believed placing strategic plan requirements in the Charter would make the Charter too rigid and suggested that the matter could instead exist through ordinance. She acknowledged the value of the strategic planning process and participation in it; however, she expressed concern about embedding operational details into the Charter. Reynolds stated that if the Charter included strategic planning language, the city should also provide regular updates and follow-through regarding implementation and funding. She

asked what specific problem the proposal sought to solve.

Vice Chair Wester noted that strategic planning represented a significant investment of both time and money and suggested that the administration likely wanted to recognize the importance of that investment by referencing the strategic plan within the Charter. She questioned whether the commission would have discussed the issue as extensively if other communities, specifically Bexley, had not already included similar language in its Charter.

Chair Barnhardt confirmed that the concept emerged during one of the commission's earlier presentations involving planning staff and the administration.

Commissioner Belisle suggested that any Charter language should remain broad and should not dictate how or when the strategic plan must be implemented. Belisle stated that if the Charter referenced the strategic plan, the language should simply require the mayor to report on it periodically. Reynolds reiterated concerns that including the requirement in the Charter would add unnecessary operational detail and stated that an ordinance could still emphasize the importance of the strategic plan without restricting future administrations or councils.

Chair Barnhardt responded that ordinances reflected actions of city council, while the Charter served as an organizational statement of the community's priorities. He stated that he viewed the strategic plan requirement as a governance issue designed to encourage Gahanna to think beyond election cycles and individual administrations. Chair Barnhardt explained that his experience participating in the Our Gahanna strategic planning process and attending public engagement events convinced him that the strategic plan captured a long-term community vision. He stated that elevating the strategic plan to the Charter level demonstrated that the community expected the city to implement the plan and regularly report progress. Chair Barnhardt further explained that the mayor naturally oversaw the day-to-day operations responsible for implementing the strategic plan and therefore should report on progress and recommend updates when necessary. He clarified that including strategic planning language in the Charter would not remove city council's authority over budgeting or implementation decisions because council would still control funding.

A motion was made by Belisle, seconded by Maxwell, to request City Attorney Tamararasan to draft the strategic plan proposal.

Discussion on the motion:

Ms. Wester expressed her appreciation for the collaboration that the strategic plan required and was in favor of the motion.

The motion carried by the following vote:

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

Absent: 1 - Hill

Planning Commission Attendance

The commission then discussed draft ballot measure number eleven regarding planning commission attendance and removal. Commissioner Mularski stated that he wanted to address proposal 020 concerning the definition of “just cause.” He moved to strike that portion of the proposal, stating that the planning commission should retain authority to define “just cause” for itself and that the remaining provisions represented the more important components of the proposal.

A motion was made by Mularski, seconded by Belisle, to strike the proposal to define “just cause” as it relates to attendance and removal of planning commissioners. The motion carried by the following vote:

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

Absent: 1 - Hill

Following the vote, Chair Barnhardt stated that the remaining portions of the proposal involved percentage-based attendance requirements and elimination procedures. He observed that the discussion suggested the commission did not necessarily want those provisions placed directly into the Charter. Instead, he stated that the commission appeared to support Charter language establishing that the planning commission should create and govern its own rules rather than having the Charter prescribe specific attendance standards.

A motion was made by Mularski, seconded by Wester, to request the city attorney to draft language permitting the planning commission to create and govern its own attendance requirements. The motion carried by the following vote:

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

Absent: 1 - Hill

Residency and Conflict-of-Interest Proposal

Chair Barnhardt then moved the discussion to the residency and conflict-of-interest alignment proposal. He stated that the proposal related to the earlier discussion concerning residency requirements and city attorney qualifications.

Mr. Mularski questioned the purpose of requiring identical residency requirements across offices. Vice Chair Wester responded her belief that the proposal involved aligning residency requirements for the city attorney and members of city council and questioned why the requirements would differ. She stated that the residency requirement itself did not appear to limit participation in city attorney elections and suggested that compensation levels and the available pool of attorneys likely presented larger issues. She further stated that elected officials should possess some familiarity with the community and expressed concern about a candidate moving into the city shortly before filing for office. Mr. Mularski expressed his uncertainty of the purpose of requiring all three elected offices to have the same residency requirement.

Ms. Belisle stated that Gahanna would become the only city with a residency requirement for an elected city attorney and questioned the need for such a change. She noted that candidates seeking elected office would naturally review the eligibility requirements before filing and argued that identical residency requirements across all offices did not appear necessary. She further stated that if the commission chose to align the requirements, she would favor the shorter fifteen-month requirement rather than a two-year standard.

Vice Chair Wester explained that the original proposal extended beyond residency requirements and also addressed political appointments and related issues. She stated that both city council and the city attorney appeared to support retaining flexibility rather than imposing uniform residency standards. She added her preference for a two-year residency requirement but would accept a fifteen-month requirement because the current Charter already required fifteen months for city council candidates and two years for mayoral candidates.

Ms. Reynolds stated that voter fatigue represented a legitimate consideration when determining which proposals should advance and acknowledged concerns about unnecessarily restricting the candidate pool for city attorney elections. She expressed her support for a

fifteen-month requirement.

Mr. Mularski suggested striking the proposal to streamline the city council and mayoral requirements, while focusing on the city attorney. He suggested the commission discuss the city attorney requirements when they discuss the overall city attorney redlines.

The commission discussed the reasoning for the current standards, including having a qualified pool of candidates and the length of time a candidate has lived in the city prior to the filing deadline required by the BOE.

Chair Barnhardt voiced his initial support for standardizing the residency requirements because the differing standards appeared inconsistent during his first review of the Charter. However, he explained that the commission's discussions changed his perspective. Chair Barnhardt stated that learning more about the elected city attorney position and the need to maintain a sufficiently qualified candidate pool caused him to reconsider imposing a residency requirement for the office. He observed that the absence of a residency requirement for elected city attorneys aligned with practices in the other communities that elected city attorneys. Chair Barnhardt further stated that the mayor served as the highly visible face of the community and therefore could justify a higher two-year residency requirement. He contrasted that with the city council position, which he believed could reasonably require only fifteen months of residency because a candidate could build meaningful community relationships and voter trust within that timeframe. Chair Barnhardt stated that he no longer believed the commission had identified a clear problem requiring residency standardization.

Mr. Maxwell stated agreement with Chair Barnhardt's revised perspective but expressed support for separately discussing whether the city attorney position should include a residency requirement. He stated that the commission should retain the existing fifteen-month and two-year residency standards for city council and the mayor, respectively.

A motion was made by Reynolds, seconded by Belisle, to strike proposal 002, residency requirements. The motion carried by the following vote:

Yes: 5 - Barnhardt, Belisle, Maxwell, Mularski and Reynolds

No: 1 - Wester

Absent: 1 - Hill

Chair Barnhardt described the remaining portion of the ballot measure as standardization of public office conflict-of-interest provisions. He noted that Council President Weaver previously provided draft language related to that concept during his presentation.

Commissioner Mularski requested the item be drafted by the city attorney.

A motion was made by Mularski, seconded by Belisle, to request the city attorney to draft standardized public office conflict-of-interest provisions. The motion carried by the following vote:

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

Absent: 1 - Hill

Special Meeting Notice Proposal

The commission next discussed draft ballot measure number eight concerning Special Meeting notice modernization and authorization for the city attorney to request Special Meetings.

A motion was made by Belisle, seconded by Mularski, to strike meeting notice modernization, CRC 005/012.

Discussion on the motion:

Commissioners agreed that similar concepts appeared in multiple proposal groupings and acknowledged that separating the concepts would simplify further discussion.

Chair Barnhardt clarified that, for purposes of organization, proposal number eight should focus solely on whether the city attorney may request special meetings, while proposal number five should encompass broader modernization issues such as public notice requirements, scheduling flexibility, and legislative procedures. Chair Barnhardt stated that the commission should first address the motion concerning public notice modernization before returning to the Special Meeting authorization discussion.

The motion carried by the following vote:

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

Absent: 1 - Hill

Following the vote, Chair Barnhardt returned discussion to the proposal allowing the city attorney to call Special Meetings. Chair Barnhardt invited comments from the commission regarding whether to advance

that concept for drafting. Mr. Mularski stated his preference to advance the proposal for drafting and review.

A motion was made by Mularski, seconded by Belisle, to request that the city attorney draft the proposal allowing the city attorney to call special meetings. The motion carried by the following vote:

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

Absent: 1 - Hill

Organizational Meeting Date, Robert's Rules Clause, Abstentions

Chair Barnhardt then moved discussion to draft ballot measure number five. He stated that the Commission already removed the public notice modernization component from the proposal. He explained that the remaining proposal components involved shifting the organizational meeting date, removing a Robert's Rules of Order carryover clause, and aligning consequences for improper voting abstentions with the due process framework contained in Section 4.07 by replacing an automatic self-executing removal provision with a notice and hearing procedure.

Vice Chair Wester stated that, based on the earlier discussion regarding proposal CRC-009 and the organizational meeting date, she now believed the proposed change could create a loophole or period during which someone on the administrative side might not properly hold office or remain sworn in.

A motion was made by Wester, seconded by Reynolds, to strike proposal CRC 009 from further consideration. The motion carried by the following vote:

Yes: 5 - Barnhardt, Maxwell, Mularski, Reynolds and Wester

No: 1 - Belisle

Absent: 1 - Hill

The commission next discussed the remaining components of draft ballot measure number five, specifically the Robert's Rules of Order carryover clause and the proposal concerning improper voting abstentions and due process consistency. Mularski stated that both items warranted drafting and still had questions about one of the provisions. He wanted additional time to review the concepts in written form.

A motion was made by Mularski, seconded by Wester, to request the city attorney to draft the remaining components of ballot measure five. The motion carried by the following vote:

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

Absent: 1 - Hill

Wards - Registered Voters to Resident Population-Based

Chair Barnhardt then moved the discussion to draft ballot measure number six, proposal CRC-025 submitted by Council President Weaver, concerning shifting ward boundary equalization from a registered voter basis to a resident population basis. Chair Barnhardt stated that, based on the day's discussion, he believed the proposal should move forward to drafting because the commission needed additional discussion on the topic.

A motion was made by Mularski, seconded by Belisle, to request the city attorney draft ballot language for proposal CRC-025.

Discussion on the motion:

Vice Chair Wester disagreed and stated that the current ward boundaries did not appear significantly imbalanced and that the proposal did not solve an identifiable problem.

The motion carried by the following vote:

Yes: 4 - Barnhardt, Belisle, Mularski and Reynolds

No: 2 - Maxwell and Wester

Absent: 1 - Hill

Chair Barnhardt stated that the commission had voted to move forward with drafting eleven ballot measures and eliminated one proposal from consideration. City Attorney Tamilarasan reviewed the draft ballot measure chart to confirm which proposals the commission approved for drafting. Before that review occurred, Mr. Mularski noted that the commission had not addressed the city attorney's separate redline proposal presented earlier in the meeting. Chair Barnhardt explained that the commission therefore needed two separate votes: one to accept the proposal for consideration and a second to direct drafting of the proposal.

A motion was made by Wester, seconded by Belisle, to add the proposal into the Commission's formal deliberation process. The motion carried by the following vote:

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

Absent: 1 - Hill

A motion was made by Belisle, seconded by Wester, to direct the city attorney to draft language related to the city attorney section changes. The motion carried by the following vote:

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

Absent: 1 - Hill

City Attorney Tamilarasan asked to review the chart aloud to confirm each proposal approved for drafting. Chair Barnhardt agreed. City Attorney Tamilarasan first identified the following items for drafting:

CRC item 001 concerning the nonpartisan primary proposal;
CRC item 004 concerning the strategic plan proposal;
CRC 003-026 concerning simplification of conflict language;
CRC 011 concerning the quorum clause; proposal CRC 021 concerning extension and due process language;
CRC 025 concerning the ward boundary shift from a registered voter basis to a resident population basis;
CRC 010 would advance only to the extent that it added the city attorney to the list of officials authorized to call special meetings;
CRC 006 concerning reorganization of departments would advance for drafting;
CRC 017 and CRC 018 regarding planning commission attendance and removal procedures;
CRC 007 concerning repeal of the Board of Zoning and Building Appeals.(BZBA) provision;
CRC 022 and CRC 023 concerning charter review frequency and scope would advance for drafting using a ten-year review cycle;
CRC 024 concerning the nondiscrimination clause would advance for drafting; and finally, the city attorney's redline proposal. She asked whether the commission wanted her redline proposal drafted separately and without redundant language already addressed through other proposals. Chair Barnhardt agreed that drafting the redline proposal separately would be a good idea.

City Attorney Tamilarasan confirmed that she would provide the draft redlines to the commission as soon as possible, before the next meeting. Chair Barnhardt thanked her and stated that the meeting was productive.

E. ADJOURNMENT.

There being no further business before the commission, the meeting

was adjourned at 9:29 p.m.

Sophia McGuire
Deputy Clerk of Council

APPROVED by the Charter Review, this
day of 2026.

Ethan Barnhardt

DRAFT