



City of Gahanna

Meeting Minutes

Committee of the Whole

200 South Hamilton Road
Gahanna, Ohio 43230

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

Jeremy A. VanMeter, Clerk of Council

Monday, February 10, 2025

7:00 PM

City Hall, Council Chambers

A. CALL TO ORDER:

Gahanna City Council met for Committee of the Whole on Monday, February 10, 2025, in Council Chambers. Vice President of Council Trenton I. Weaver, Chair, called the meeting to order at 7:04 p.m. The agenda was published on February 7, 2025. All members were present for the meeting. There was one addition to the agenda under Items from the Council Office: Community Grant Program Appointments.

B. ITEMS FROM THE PLANNING COMMISSION:

[ORD-0001-2025](#)

AN ORDINANCE TO AMEND THE CITY OF GAHANNA CODE PART ELEVEN ZONING CHAPTER SECTION 1117.10(e)(1)A - REQUIRED IMPROVEMENTS; AND DECLARING AN EMERGENCY

Director of Planning Michael Blackford presented Council with a request to amend Section 1117.10 of the zoning ordinance. He clarified that this was not a new zoning code, as this section was in place for over 50 years. The code pertains to infrastructure-related improvements, including sidewalks, storm sewers, and street lighting. However, the existing language did not clearly define when adherence to these requirements was necessary. The proposed amendment aimed to clarify that these standards would apply specifically to site civil engineering plans, which are generally associated with large-scale land disturbances, typically one acre or more. This would include subdivisions and new construction projects, such as office buildings and retail areas. The amendment would ensure that adherence to these infrastructure requirements would not apply to minor permits, such as shed or fence permits, thereby streamlining the process for smaller projects. Director Blackford noted that the amendment was presented to the Planning Commission, which unanimously recommended its approval. He also mentioned that additional code changes related to this topic, located in Chapter 9, would be brought before the Council in the near future. He assured the Council that approving this amendment would not create any inconsistencies within the zoning code.

Councilmember McGregor asked whether the amendment would only apply to large parcels. Director Blackford confirmed that it would, explaining that while the code did not specify an exact parcel size, site civil engineering plans generally apply to areas around one acre or larger. However, other triggers could apply in certain cases, depending on the nature of the development. He reiterated that the amendment was designed to remove unnecessary infrastructure requirements for minor site improvements on already developed properties.

President Bowers sought further clarification, asking if the standards would apply to new construction, new builds, or total redevelopment of an existing parcel. Director Blackford confirmed that in those cases, adherence to these standards would be required.

Councilmember Renner inquired about how the proposed zoning code amendment came about. Director Blackford explained that the code in question was not new, with his research dating it back to at least 1975. Over time, as new staff members joined the department, they reviewed existing regulations and interpreted them based on the way the code was written. He noted that the current language did not differentiate between different permit types, which led to discussions among staff and the determination that a code amendment was necessary to clarify when adherence to the requirements was required. Councilmember Renner then asked if there was a specific permit or project currently before the Planning Commission that hinged on this amendment. Director Blackford responded that there was no single permit dependent on the change. However, he stated that the issue had become apparent through the zoning and building permit process and was being addressed through the proposed amendment.

Councilmember Padova expressed her appreciation for the update and noted that there had been some confusion over the past year regarding these zoning requirements. She asked for clarification on how the amendment would apply to a residential home build versus a larger development, such as a strip mall. Director Blackford explained that a new home would also have to adhere to the requirements, as outlined in the code. He stated that most of the regulations related to infrastructure improvements were contained in Chapter 9, which would be presented to Council soon for further discussion. The upcoming changes to Chapter 9 would provide additional details and examples to help clarify when these standards apply, making the process clearer for both internal staff and external applicants. Councilmember Padova then asked if there would be a larger effort to train staff on how to guide residents when they call with questions about whether they need a site civil engineering plan or other permitting requirements. Director Blackford confirmed that staff training would be part of the process.

President Bowers asked if the design plan application would distinguish between different types of developments. Director Blackford requested clarification on her question. President Bowers elaborated, asking if the application process would specify different permitting paths based on the type of development. Mayor Jadwin referenced the terminology "design review and

final development plan" for clarification. President Bowers asked if the application process would distinguish between different types of development requests. Director Blackford explained that while larger projects generally have a clearer understanding of the permitting process due to early communication with city staff, smaller projects, such as interior improvements or painting a building, follow a different path and involve different personnel, such as contractors rather than engineers or architects. He stated that the city strives to provide clear roadmaps to applicants to minimize uncertainty and ensure successful project outcomes.

President Bowers then asked whether, after the adoption of the proposed changes to Chapter 11 and the forthcoming amendments to Chapter 9, a more structured process review would take place. Director Blackford confirmed that the amendments would provide further specificity regarding when requirements apply and would be closely tied to the application and permitting process. President Bowers also inquired whether the amendments would not only clarify who is exempt from subsection (e) but also provide guidance for minor project applicants on what is required. Director Blackford responded that, due to the complexity and diversity of projects, there would not be a single checklist applicable to all cases. Instead, staff would guide applicants through the necessary requirements based on the nature of their projects. He reiterated that while the permitting software provides prompts and flags relevant requirements based on the type of permit being submitted, the best approach remains direct communication with staff to ensure applicants have the necessary information.

President Bowers acknowledged the effort to improve clarity and expressed appreciation for making the permitting process as straightforward as possible for residents looking to make property improvements. Director Blackford emphasized that the goal is to make the permitting process as efficient as possible for external applicants, which, in turn, improves efficiency for internal staff. He reaffirmed the city's commitment to working closely with residents and developers to guide them through the necessary steps.

Councilmember McGregor asked whether there was anything pending that would be directly affected by the proposed amendment and questioned why it was being considered as an emergency measure. Director Blackford clarified that he had not specifically requested emergency status and was unsure where that designation had originated. He explained that while there was no single large-scale project in mind, that this amendment would immediately impact, numerous permits were currently under review that could be affected. He noted that while major projects like Sheetz or the Johnstown Road apartments would not be directly influenced, smaller permits such as right-of-way permits, shed permits, or fence permits currently have staff comments requiring additional information. If the amendment were adopted, some of those requirements could potentially be eliminated.

President Bowers asked if the emergency designation would assist permit applicants by expediting their improvement projects. Director Blackford confirmed that it would. He explained that the original intent was to adopt this amendment in conjunction with the forthcoming Chapter 9 changes, but since

those were not yet ready, the decision was made to proceed with Chapter 11 separately to provide relief to permit applicants sooner. President Bowers expressed appreciation for the amendment, stating that it would help individuals looking to complete site improvements without requiring full civil engineering plans.

Recommendation: Introduction/First Reading on Regular Agenda on 2/17/2025; Public Hearing and Second Reading/Adoption on Regular Agenda on 3/3/2025.

C. ITEMS FROM THE SENIOR DIRECTOR OF OPERATIONS:

825 Tech Center Drive Update

[2025-0033](#)

Gahanna Municipal Complex (825 Tech Center Drive) Construction Update 2.10.2025

Kevin Schultz, Senior Director of Operations, provided an update on the progress at 825 Tech Center Drive. He noted that the last update was given in November 2024, covering work completed through October 2024, and that the budget season had temporarily delayed further discussions. He expressed appreciation for the opportunity to share the latest developments and reiterated that the project was successfully meeting all ten of its objectives. Schultz acknowledged the many individuals who contributed to the project, including Chief Spence, Senior Director Miranda Vollmer, Senior Deputy Director Corey Wybensing, the Mayor, and Council. He emphasized that the project reflects a collective effort and that its quality speaks to the dedication of all involved. He stated that the update presented was current as of the end of January 2025, with financials and progress reflecting that timeframe. He also noted that the drone footage included in the presentation was captured that morning, providing a real-time look at the site.

Exterior and Interior Updates

Regarding key progress points, Schultz reported that American Electric Power Company, Inc (AEP) placed a new transformer on the site. From December through early January, the transformer was upsized, and the building operated on temporary power. Additionally, sheathing was installed on the front of the building to allow for the placement of temporary heaters, which enabled continued construction inside the facility. Schultz detailed interior progress, noting that drywall installation had begun on the second and third floors. Thanks to the temporary heating system, some areas had already been taped and spackled, with utility rooms and smaller spaces even receiving finished paint. He explained that painting these areas before installing electrical conduits made the process more efficient. He emphasized the rapid progress made despite challenging winter conditions, highlighting that, as of that evening, some painted walls were already in place-an impressive milestone considering the frigid temperatures just a few weeks prior.

Senior Director Schultz noted that exterior metal framing was completed, along with all structural steel. He reminded Council that they participated in

the beam signing ceremony, which took place either just before or just after Thanksgiving 2024, depending on weather conditions. Schultz reported that masonry work had begun on the sally ports and other areas of the building where brick would be applied. He attempted to display drone footage showcasing the progress, but technical difficulties prevented the video from playing properly. He offered to remain after the meeting for anyone who wished to view the footage. He described key construction developments, including the exterior metal framing of the multi-purpose room, which was currently underway. He pointed out workers walking on the roof and acknowledged that it appeared somewhat precarious. Additionally, he highlighted masonry work being conducted on different sections of the building. Schultz mentioned that curtain wall installation had begun, explaining that this term refers to the glass front of the building. He noted that the exterior of the building would change rapidly over the next few weeks as more glass and masonry elements were put in place. Looking ahead, he stated that the goal was for the building to be fully enclosed and dried in by the end of March 2025. Given that it was early February, he expressed confidence that the next several weeks would bring significant visible progress toward that milestone. He reported that the entire exterior of the existing structure had been spray-foamed for insulation. This improvement was incorporated during the extensive demolition phase, allowing the team to insulate the entire exterior shell. Additionally, rear windows were replaced, enhancing the overall quality of the building and improving its HVAC performance. Fireproofing work was being carried out in mechanical shafts and other areas. Schultz also mentioned that as part of the project, certain elements of the building were being updated or repaired due to incomplete work from the original construction in the late 1990s. He concluded by noting that network, audio, and video cabling installation had begun, with low-voltage cabling rough-ins now in progress on the second and third floors. Wiring was being installed, marking another step forward in the building's development.

Schedule

Senior Director Schultz reported that the project was 34% complete based on time. He noted that there had been approximately 12 weather days since the project began on May 1, 2024, most of which occurred in December 2024 and January 2025, due to extreme cold temperatures, which made outdoor work, such as hanging steel, particularly difficult. He also acknowledged that there were one or two weather days in November 2024, that he did not correctly report in the previous update.

Photo Walk-Through

Schultz then reviewed exterior and interior construction progress, sharing several project photos. He highlighted the training center and firing range located in the basement of the building, pointing out the observation bay windows overlooking the training facility and the staircase that was installed to provide access between the basement and the upper levels. Next, he described the multi-purpose room, located at the front of the building, noting that the exterior steel framing was completed and that sheathing was beginning to be installed in preparation for masonry work. He also pointed out

progress on the two sally ports, where brickwork was underway to match the existing structure. Schultz reported that site work for stormwater facilities had also begun, acknowledging that while much of the focus tends to be on the visible construction, critical infrastructure work, such as stormwater management, was progressing as well.

Reviewing interior developments, he described the city staff locker room in the gym facility, showing photos of four restroom areas and locker space that was framed. He also shared an image of an area within the first floor of the Police Department, highlighting the location of the evidence room and noting that additional concrete pour backs were needed before further interior construction could take place. Schultz also discussed the installation of the curtain wall and glazing, explaining that these elements would significantly transform the building's exterior over the coming months. He concluded by showing an image of the main hallway, noting that the perspective of the photo was with him standing at the customer service windows looking toward the Senior Center. He pointed out that a similar corridor would connect the main lobby to the Police Department, further enhancing the accessibility and functionality of the building.

Budgeted Allowance & Contingencies

Senior Director Schultz provided an update on the financial status of the 825 Tech Center Drive project and outlined upcoming developments. He reported that the project was 34% complete based on time, and that approximately \$22 million, or 37% of the total construction contract, was invoiced and paid. This total covered labor, materials, and work completed on-site. He presented two financial charts summarizing the Guaranteed Maximum Price (GMP) contracts with Elford, which reflected the total construction agreement. Schultz explained the budgeted allowances and contingencies built into the project. He reminded Council that allowances, totaling approximately \$1.1 million, were already included in the \$59 million project budget. Allowances cover anticipated expenses, such as miscellaneous demolition, which accounted for unexpected additional work. He gave an example of extra demolition costs due to the discovery of an additional layer of tile beneath the carpet that was not originally anticipated. He clarified that allowances do not increase the overall project cost but rather absorb unexpected costs within the original budget. He further described the two types of contingencies-owner's contingency and construction contingency-which cover unforeseen expenses or necessary changes. One example he cited was the need to upgrade network cable trays in the fitness room from wire racks to solid steel trays for security reasons, preventing unauthorized access from the workout area to the police facility.

Currently, the total budget for allowances and contingencies is approximately \$4.8 million, of which \$485,000, or about 10%, has been used. Schultz emphasized that the project remains financially healthy, as only a small percentage of the contingency funds were expended at this stage. He also mentioned that upcoming costs, such as upgrades to electric vehicle (EV) chargers in the back parking lot, would be included in a future update.

Looking ahead, Schultz stated that he would continue to provide project updates at the first Committee meeting of every month until the building is completed. Future presentations would include side-by-side renderings and real-time photos from the same vantage points to show how the construction was progressing in comparison to the original design. He encouraged Council members to schedule site visits in the coming weeks, noting that the second and third floors were largely complete, allowing for a clear sense of how the Council Office space and other areas would look and function. He emphasized that while visiting the site earlier in the project might not have been as informative, due to the steel framework and unfinished structure, the space had now taken shape and was ready for walkthroughs. Schultz concluded by noting that the temporary heating on the second and third floors was effective, making site visits comfortable even in cold weather. He reiterated his willingness to coordinate individual or group tours for Councilmembers to experience the transformation firsthand. He then opened the floor for questions.

Questions from Council

President Bowers thanked Senior Director Schultz for his comprehensive update and asked for clarification on the overall completion status of the project. She noted that Schultz had provided updates on completion by time and total payout but inquired whether there was an estimate for the overall project completion.

Director Schultz responded that the project had been affected by 12 weather-related workdays, which were business days rather than calendar days. However, he stated that progress remained on track, and the addition of temporary heating had helped maintain momentum. He noted that he had not received any negative reports regarding the schedule. He informed the Council that an owners' meeting was scheduled for the following day, February 11, 2025, where discussions would begin on logistics and planning for the transition from the current facility to the new building. He highlighted that one key consideration would be when IT personnel could enter the facility to begin network installations, which would provide a clearer timeline for occupancy. Schultz cautioned that the term "substantial completion" would play a significant role in determining the move-in date. He explained that substantial completion refers to the point when Elford turns over the building to the city but emphasized that occupancy would not be immediate. Furniture installation alone is expected to take two to three months, which would place the move-in timeframe around January or February of the following year. He stated that part of the logistical planning process would involve determining the sequence of department relocations, identifying which groups would move first and which would transition later. He anticipated that a more comprehensive project schedule would be available for presentation at the March or April update, providing a clearer picture of when the building would be fully operational.

D. ITEMS FROM THE COUNCIL OFFICE:

Historical Records Digitization Grant Final Report

[2025-0027](#)

Village of Gahanna Records Grant Project - Final Report 2.10.2025

Deputy Clerk of Council Sophia McGuire provided an update on the historical records digitization project, which was funded by a grant from the Ohio Historical Records Advisory Board (OHRAB). She reminded the Council that she presented an interim report and appropriation request in August 2024. The grant, awarded in April 2024, provided \$2,940 in funding to scan and make accessible historical Village Council records from 1881 to 1970. McGuire reported that the scanning process was completed in the spring and summer of 2024 through a collaboration with ScanWorks and Council Office intern Charlie Schneider. The digitized records included meeting minutes, ordinances, and resolutions, totaling approximately 4,100 pages scanned from original record books. As part of the grant requirements, the project made these records publicly accessible through the Legistar system rather than keeping them solely in office archives. Additionally, an index of ordinances and resolutions would be uploaded to Legistar for improved access. She noted that some records were previously digitized from microfilm created in the 1990s, but these copies were low quality, difficult to read, and not searchable. In contrast, the newly scanned documents were high-quality, full-color PDFs that met archival standards and significantly improved legibility.

McGuire provided a demonstration on how to access the historical records through gahanna.legistar.com. She explained that users should select "Agendas and Minutes", filter for all years and City Council records, and ensure the meeting date dropdown is adjusted to display the oldest records first. Clicking on the meeting minutes link would provide a clear, zoomable document for public viewing.

Although the grant-funded portion of the project was complete, McGuire outlined next steps to enhance accessibility. Since most records before 1955-1956 were handwritten, they remain unsearchable. To address this, McGuire proposed two options: 1) Artificial Intelligence (AI) transcription services, such as Transkribus, which could generate text from handwriting recognition, though quality control would be needed, and 2) Volunteer-based transcriptions, where community members or historical groups could manually transcribe records, allowing keyword searches in Legistar. She emphasized that engaging volunteers, possibly through the Historical Society, could help promote the project while making records more accessible.

To ensure long-term preservation, McGuire reported that all digitized records were backed up in multiple locations: an external hard drive, the city's internal network, and Legistar. The original physical records would be stored off-site in a climate-controlled facility to prevent deterioration. She encouraged Council members to share information about the project through social media or word of mouth to help connect residents with Gahanna's historical records.

Vice President Weaver expressed enthusiasm for the project, calling it "really

amazing” and praising the effort to preserve the city’s history.

Councilmember Jones also commended the work, referencing recent news coverage about declining cursive literacy and appreciating that Gahanna’s records were now clear and accessible. McGuire acknowledged that cursive readability remains a challenge, requiring a targeted audience familiar with historical handwriting styles.

Councilmember McGregor asked about the time range of the records, and McGuire confirmed that meeting minutes extend into the 1960s, while ordinances and resolutions continue through 1970-1971, the year Gahanna became a city. Post-incorporation records were already digitized and available online.

Vice President Weaver reiterated his appreciation for the project and noted that his day job involves working with AI tools for deed recognition and data extraction from historical records. He highlighted how similar technologies could enhance accessibility and accuracy for archival records and thanked McGuire for her work.

Federal Policy Advocacy

[2025-0026](#)

Protecting Tax-Exempt Status of Municipal Bonds

Vice President Weaver introduced a discussion on federal policy advocacy, specifically regarding proposed changes to the tax-exempt status of municipal bonds. He referenced a document from the U.S. House Ways and Means Committee that was shared by Councilmember Schnetzer, which outlined approximately 50 pages of proposed policy items, including one that would remove the tax exemption on interest earned for municipal bonds. Weaver and Schnetzer followed up on this issue by meeting with MORPC’s Director of Government Affairs to explore advocacy efforts against the proposed removal of this exemption. Weaver noted that Schnetzer conducted an analysis estimating that if the exemption were removed at the time the city issued bonds for the 825 Tech Center Drive project, the increased interest rates would have resulted in an additional \$15.5 million in costs over the life of the loan. He invited the Council to consider how they would like to engage in advocacy on this issue, particularly given the many anticipated changes at the federal level with the new Congress and administration.

Councilmember Schnetzer provided additional context, explaining that the issue stemmed from the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act (TCJA) of 2017, which enacted tax cuts that are set to expire on December 31, 2025. Without Congressional action, most individuals would see a tax increase, and Congress is now exploring options to extend those tax cuts. To extend the tax cuts, Congress is expected to use a reconciliation process, which allows passage of budget-related legislation with a simple majority, bypassing the filibuster. However, the process requires that each provision be analyzed for its impact on the federal deficit. Extending the existing tax cuts for another ten years is projected to increase the deficit by approximately \$4.5 trillion. On January 17, 2025, the House Ways and Means Committee released a

51-page document with over 100 proposed revenue-generating measures to offset the deficit increase. Among them was the proposal to remove the tax-exempt status of municipal bonds. The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) scored this change at \$250 billion in additional federal revenue over a ten-year period, while municipal advocacy groups estimate that the cost to state and local governments could reach \$800 billion over the same period. Schnetzer explained that municipal bonds are critical for funding large capital projects at the local and state level. Just as individuals typically finance long-term assets like homes through mortgages, local governments use bonds to fund projects such as city halls, police headquarters, and infrastructure improvements. He reiterated that when Gahanna issued \$64 million in bonds for 825 Tech Center Drive, the tax exemption kept interest rates lower. Had the bonds been taxable, the city would have incurred an additional \$15.5 million in costs over a 27-year period. While the proposed change would not impact existing municipal bonds, Schnetzer stressed that future projects would be significantly more expensive to finance, creating financial pressures on local budgets. He emphasized that this is the primary concern and reason for potential advocacy efforts. Schnetzer concluded by turning the discussion back to Vice President Weaver, asking if Council would like to take action to ensure that Congress understands how removing the municipal bond tax exemption would negatively impact Gahanna and other local governments.

Vice President Trenton Weaver provided an update on advocacy efforts following discussions with Joe Garrity, Government Affairs Director at the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission (MORPC). Garrity recommended that the city reach out to the Ohio Municipal League (OML) and collaborate with other local governments in Central Ohio. Weaver reported that he had contacted Director Starrett at OML and had also reached out to Mayor Grooms of Dublin. He explained that Ohio has two representatives on the U.S. House Ways and Means Committee: Congressman Mike Carey and Congressman Max Miller. Since Congressman Carey represents part of Central Ohio, Weaver had informed Congresswoman Joyce Beatty's office as a courtesy, though he noted that her influence on this particular issue would be limited since it was being handled by Ways and Means. Weaver expressed willingness to reach out to Congressman Carey's office but deferred to Mayor Laurie Jadwin, who indicated that she already initiated contact.

Mayor Jadwin confirmed that she was in the process of scheduling a meeting with Representative Carey. She encouraged continued outreach to Representative Beatty, emphasizing her influence and extensive network. Additionally, she reported that she was also reaching out to Representative Troy Balderson to discuss the issue. Mayor Jadwin shared that during a recent Central Ohio Mayors and Managers Association meeting, she had spoken with Mayor Grooms of Dublin, as well as other Central Ohio mayors, none of whom were previously aware of the proposal. She thanked Councilmember Schnetzer for bringing the issue to the city's attention. She noted that Mayor Spalding of New Albany, whose district is also represented by Congressman Carey, was reaching out to Carey's office as well. She stressed the importance of expanding advocacy efforts beyond Central Ohio

and leveraging OML's network to engage municipal leaders across the state, encouraging them to contact their respective congressional representatives.

Vice President Weaver thanked Mayor Jadwin for her efforts and reiterated the importance of coordinated outreach. Weaver then suggested that the Council consider passing a joint resolution or formal letter, noting that similar actions were taken in the past on issues of significant municipal impact.

President Bowers inquired whether there were additional federal policy items, aside from the proposed removal of the municipal bond tax exemption, that could impact municipal finance.

Councilmember Schnetzer responded that while there were other policy considerations listed in the House Ways and Means Committee's recent document, the municipal bond exemption was the most direct and significant issue for Gahanna. He explained that other provisions, such as changing the tax-exempt status of private activity bonds, taxing nonprofit hospitals, or increasing taxes on university endowments, would primarily affect specific sectors rather than directly impacting the city's financial operations. Schnetzer reiterated that the tax-exempt status of municipal bonds allows local governments to borrow at lower interest rates. He explained that when Gahanna issued \$64 million in bonds for 825 Tech Center Drive, the city secured an interest rate between 3.5% and 4%, whereas taxable interest rates at the time were two percentage points higher. He equated the potential financial burden to that of an individual homeowner with a 3% mortgage suddenly facing a 5.5% rate, emphasizing that such an increase would impose a significant cost burden on future municipal projects. He also noted the political contradiction in the proposal, highlighting that infrastructure investment is one of the few bipartisan priorities in Washington, D.C., yet this policy change would make financing infrastructure projects substantially more difficult. He concluded that removing the municipal bond tax exemption would be the most critical issue for the city to focus on.

President Bowers agreed and supported Vice President Weaver's earlier suggestion of drafting a joint resolution or proclamation opposing the policy change. She suggested that if the resolution were aggregated with other communities or worked on in partnership with the Ohio Municipal League (OML), it could be mirrored across the state and even nationwide. She also mentioned that the National League of Cities (NLC) could be a valuable advocacy partner, though she only had limited contacts within the organization.

Councilmember Schnetzer added that several governmental finance organizations had already taken notice of the issue. He pointed to the Public Finance Network (PFN), which includes groups such as the Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA), International City/County Management Association (ICMA), the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE), the National Association of Bond Lawyers (NABL), and the Council of Development Finance Agencies (CDFA). He suggested that these organizations could provide guidance, talking points, and additional advocacy support.

President Bowers agreed that these organizations might already have advocacy efforts underway and suggested that next steps should involve collaboration between the administration and Councilmembers to coordinate outreach efforts.

Mayor Jadwin confirmed that she had already begun outreach efforts and supported the idea of dividing responsibilities to maximize impact.

Councilmember Schnetzer also mentioned that the PFN maintains a website, BuiltByBonds.com, which features a map of municipal bond-financed projects. He suggested that Gahanna could upload details about 825 Tech Center Drive to help demonstrate the importance of municipal bonds in funding essential infrastructure. Mayor Jadwin agreed and stated that Finance Director Bury would be able to assist in providing the necessary details for submission.

Elected Officials' Compensation Review - Preliminary Discussion

President Bowers introduced a discussion regarding elected officials' compensation, noting that while the city had conducted compensation reviews and adopted a compensation plan for employees, these reviews did not include elected officials' salaries. She stated that there had been no review or adjustments to elected official salaries in over a decade, possibly longer. She cited Section 4.17 of the city's Code of Ordinances, which places salary determinations for elected officials within the purview of City Council. According to the ordinance, any salary changes would take effect at the start of a new term and continue through that term, ensuring that current officeholders do not vote on their own salaries. Any changes made would apply only to subsequent councilmembers after an election cycle. President Bowers emphasized the importance of reviewing and potentially amending elected officials' salaries for several reasons. She referenced a preliminary survey conducted the previous year that compared Gahanna's elected official salaries with those in peer cities across the region. The survey indicated that Gahanna's compensation was below regional standards. She stated that maintaining competitive compensation was important for ensuring fair pay for those who serve the public, especially for individuals who do not have passive income or other financial resources to supplement their time commitment to public service. Additionally, she highlighted a practical concern raised previously by Councilmember McGregor-City Council salaries have fallen below the threshold required to qualify for OPERS health insurance credit. She noted that ensuring future councilmembers meet OPERS eligibility requirements was a compelling reason to consider adjustments.

President Bowers proposed introducing three separate ordinances to address compensation for the Mayor, the City Attorney, and for City Councilmembers. She sought feedback on the effective date for ward seats, explaining that for at-large members, the Mayor, and the City Attorney, the new compensation would take effect on January 2, 2028, at the start of the next term. However, for ward seats, the decision would be between an effective date of January 2, 2026, or deferring changes until January 2, 2030.

She noted that delaying changes until 2030 would mean an additional four-year gap in OPERS credit eligibility, which she felt was a long deferral. Regarding the amount of compensation, she indicated that she would present research comparing regional and peer communities at a subsequent committee meeting. She also suggested benchmarking full-time elected positions (such as the Mayor and City Attorney) against executive and senior staff salaries within the city. In terms of process, President Bowers stated that she intended to bring the topic back to committee in two weeks for further discussion, with firmer details and data. She proposed advancing the ordinances for a first reading in March.

Assistant City Attorney Matt Roth provided legal clarification regarding the timing of setting elected officials' salaries. He explained that the Ohio Ethics Commission generally requires that salaries be established before the filing deadline for the election. The rationale is that potential candidates should be aware of the compensation before deciding to run for office. He noted that some communities have made errors by setting salaries too close to the election, and the Ethics Commission discourages such timing.

President Bowers acknowledged Roth's clarification and noted that ward seats in Gahanna do not have a filing deadline until August, as there is no primary election. She stated that if the Council finalized salary changes in the first quarter of the year, they could still take effect for 2026.

Councilmember McGregor remarked that she had previously proposed a salary review and adjustment two and four years ago, but the issue had not moved forward at that time.

President Bowers expressed her support for advancing the discussion, stating that she was committed to bringing the matter forward.

Councilmember Schnetzer suggested that before drafting any ordinances, the Council should first review relevant data on regional salary comparisons. He acknowledged that this topic had been discussed before but wanted to ensure a data-driven approach before proceeding.

President Bowers clarified that no ordinances had yet been drafted. She confirmed that she would first bring the topic back to Committee for discussion, during which she would share survey data on peer communities' compensation structures. She stated that she would not advance any ordinances for a first reading until after the Council had reviewed the information. She also referenced a recent *Columbus Dispatch* article that examined regional mayoral compensation, which highlighted that Gahanna's mayoral salary was below the regional average.

Vice President Weaver sought confirmation on the timing of salary adjustments for at-large members. He noted that at-large Council terms expire on January 1, 2028, and asked whether their salaries could take effect in January 2028 under the proposed plan. He also inquired whether ward seat salaries could be adjusted mid-term or if such a change would be impermissible.

President Bowers responded by referencing Section 4.17 of the city's Code of Ordinances, which requires that compensation be fixed for a full term and continue from term to term. Based on this provision, she interpreted that salary adjustments could not take effect in the middle of a term and would have to be established at the start of the next term.

Councilmember McGregor clarified that if salary adjustments for ward councilmembers were approved this year, they would take effect in January 2026, whereas salary changes for at-large councilmembers, the Mayor, and the City Attorney would take effect in January 2028. She reiterated that salaries cannot be changed in the middle of a term.

President Merisa Bowers confirmed that this interpretation aligned with Section 4.17 of the city's Code of Ordinances, unless legal counsel advised otherwise.

Assistant City Attorney Roth affirmed that this was correct, stating that there would be a temporary disparity between ward and at-large councilmembers' salaries until all positions cycled through their respective terms.

President Bowers acknowledged this as an unfortunate side effect of the city's staggered election system but noted that it was unavoidable given the structure of Council terms.

Vice President Weaver expressed appreciation for the clarification and stated that he had seen some of the data compiled by the Clerk's Office. He looked forward to a more in-depth discussion and believed that sharing the data would be beneficial for all councilmembers.

Councilmember McGregor requested that the data include city size, population, and other relevant demographic information to provide additional context for comparisons. Vice President Weaver confirmed that such details were included in the compiled data.

Councilmember Renner remarked that while he welcomed discussions on the topic and was interested in reviewing the data, he was unlikely to support any salary adjustments unless the current compensation levels were significantly out of line.

Community Grant Program Appointments

President Bowers informed the Council that, during the pre-leadership meeting, Deputy Director Wybensing shared that there would be two positions on the Community Grant Program Review Board that required Council appointees. She wanted to ensure that Councilmembers were aware of this before the next Council meeting, where they could enter Executive Session to discuss potential appointees. Bowers clarified that the appointments would be for a one-year cycle and would require only a short-term commitment. She also noted that Wybensing expressed a desire for appointments to be made as soon as possible to allow the program

to proceed without delay. She then invited the administration to add any further details.

Mayor Jadwin stated that there were no additional updates but reminded the Council that during the budget discussions last year, there was a request for the administration to explore non-tax revenue sources to help fund the Community Grant Program. She informed the Council that Finance Director Bury would address this topic during the year-end financial report at the March 24, 2025, Committee meeting.

Councilmember Jones asked for clarification on the timeline for administering the Community Grant Program and why it was important to make appointments quickly.

Deputy Director Wybensing explained that since the program was transitioning from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds to local dollars, some aspects of the program were being revamped, though the main priorities would remain unchanged. He outlined the following timeline:

First week of April 2025: Grants would go live.

Mid-to-late April 2025: A two-to-three-week application period for nonprofits to apply.

Third week of April 2025: Grant applications would be submitted for review.

Last week of April/First week of May 2025: The committee would review applications and make selections.

Wybensing noted that the committee typically required only a two-to-three-hour commitment from its members. Since this would be the third year of the program, the process had been refined to be as efficient as possible. He also mentioned that the committee would be expanding from three members to five, which could make scheduling more complex, but they would attempt to accommodate members' availability, including early morning meetings if necessary.

E. ADJOURNMENT:

With no further business before the Committee of the Whole, the Chair adjourned the meeting at 8:15 p.m.

Jeremy A. VanMeter
Clerk of Council

*APPROVED by the Committee of the Whole, this
day of 2025.*

Trenton I. Weaver