



To: City of Gahanna Charter Review Commissioners

cc: City Council Clerk VanMeter, Mayor Jadwin, City Attorney Tamarasan, Members of City Council

From: Merisa Bowers, Gahanna City Councilwoman, At-large

Date: March 20, 2026

**Re: Article IV of the City of Gahanna Charter**

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## **Introduction**

I am submitting this memorandum for the Charter Review Commission's consideration in review of Article IV (City Council) of the City of Gahanna Charter. The amendments I have identified in this memo are intended to support the Commission's charge to evaluate the Charter and identify opportunities so that it continues to serve the City effectively, transparently, and in a manner consistent with modern governance practices.

Through my service on Council, including time in leadership, and prior committee service with the City, I have had the opportunity to observe both the strengths of the current Charter provisions and areas where clarification or refinement could enhance Council's effectiveness. These observations arise from the practical application of the Charter in areas such as meeting administration, legislative procedure, and internal governance.

The proposed amendments I have offered are targeted, experience-informed refinements rather than broad structural changes. They are guided by several overarching considerations, including:

- Reducing unnecessarily prescriptive provisions that may limit the City's ability to adapt to evolving practices and technologies;
- Aligning Charter language with current legal requirements, including Ohio Open Meetings and Sunshine laws;
- Promoting clarity and consistency between the Charter and Council's adopted rules and procedures; and
- Supporting continuity and effective administration within Council operations.

These recommendations are presented with full respect for the Commission's independent review process and are intended to assist, not constrain, your deliberations. In several instances, the proposals are offered as options for consideration, recognizing that multiple approaches may reasonably achieve similar objectives.

**I welcome the opportunity to discuss these recommendations with the Commission and Council colleagues at the Commission's April 9 meeting and to provide additional context or answer any questions.**

**I also look forward to engaging in a collaborative dialogue and considering any feedback or alternative perspectives the Commission may wish to explore.**

- **SECTION 4.02 - COMPOSITION AND TERM.**

**Current Text:**

At the regular municipal election in 2013, and every four (4) years thereafter, four (4) members of Council shall be elected from wards and shall serve four (4) year terms. At the regular municipal election in 2015, and every four (4) years thereafter, three (3) members of Council shall be elected at large for four (4) year terms. **Terms shall commence on January 2 immediately following the election for that position and terminate on January 1 immediately following the next regular municipal election for that position.** The geographical definition of the ward areas will be balanced to the extent practicable based on numbers of registered voters and will be established by ordinance, taking effect sixty (60) days prior to the petition filing deadline for the election of members of Council by wards, to remain effective for the term of the positions. (Amended Nov. 7, 2006.) (Amended Nov. 8, 2011)

**Commentary:**

No change likely necessary. Just calling to your attention the start and end of elected terms when reconsidering organizational and first meeting dates of the calendar year.

- **Section 4.03 - QUALIFICATIONS.**

**Commentary:**

I support standardization of term of residency/continuous qualified elector language across elected offices. The 15-month term of continuous qualified elector requirement within this Charter section was proposed and adopted in 2021.

- **SECTION 4.04 - PRESIDENT, AND VICE PRESIDENT OF COUNCIL.**

**Current Text:**

At the first regular meeting of Council in January of each year as provided in [Section 4.10](#), Council shall, by majority vote, elect from its membership a President of Council and a Vice President of Council, each to serve for a term of one (1) year.

The President of Council, or, in the President of Council's absence, the Vice President of Council, shall preside at all meetings of Council.

The President and Vice President of Council, neither by virtue of holding such offices nor in performing the duties of Acting Mayor as provided in [Section 3.06](#) of this Charter, shall be deprived of their powers and rights or be relieved of any of their duties or obligations as members of Council. (Amended Nov. 7, 2006.)

**Commentary:**

I wish to raise to your attention the one-year term established by Charter for council leadership. Council leadership requires often unseen investment of time, training, and administrative processes. Council President is the supervisor of the Clerk of Council, who supervises Council office staff. There are HR and supervisory tasks assigned to the President. Given the importance of continuity, the practices and relationship development that take time to bear fruit, and the administrative oversight and internal processes, I suggest that the Commission may wish to consider an amendment to this Charter section that would allow a two-year term for Council President and Vice President, effective beginning in **2028** (due to election cycle). In recent years, Presidents have been serving two consecutive years, and in years prior, there was often an informal rotation. With the heightened administrative processes within Council office, it may be appropriate to consider establishing a two-year term.

The Commission may wish to consider language allowing for a vote to remove the President, and flexibility in the event a member is unable or unwilling to continue to serve as President for the full term.

**Alternatively**, the Commission may wish to strike the clause establishing the term from the Charter, allowing Council to establish leadership terms, removal, and vacancy processes within its Rules.

For comparison to a few of our neighboring communities:

| Municipality    | Leadership Election  |
|-----------------|--|
| Upper Arlington | Council President (ceremonial mayor) elected by Councilmembers to serve two-year term    |
| Reynoldsburg    | Voters directly elect Council President to serve four-year term                          |
| Columbus        | Council President elected by Councilmembers to serve two-year term                       |
| Westerville     | Council Chair (and other leadership) elected by Councilmembers to serve a two-year term. |

• **SECTION 4.10 - REGULAR MEETINGS.**

**Current Text:**

On January 2nd (if January 2nd is a Sunday, then on January 3rd) of each year, Council shall convene and organize at the Council Chambers of the Municipality at a time to be determined by Council rules of procedure. The Mayor, or one appointed by the Mayor, shall preside as temporary chairperson only until the President of Council is elected.

Thereafter, Council shall meet at such times as may be prescribed by its own rules, regulations, bylaws, or by resolution or ordinance, except that it shall hold regular meetings at least twice during each calendar month.

All regular and special meetings of Council shall be held at the Council Chambers, unless the members of Council decide that a particular regular or special meeting may occasion a large public attendance which the Council Chambers would be unable to accommodate. In that case, Council may direct said meeting to be held in some other public or private place with larger accommodations, and shall direct that notice of the change of the meeting place be given by publication in a newspaper of local circulation at least one week before the said Council meeting is scheduled. (Amended Nov. 7, 2006.)

**Commentary:**

The current highlighted language is overly prescriptive and out of step with modern practices. See below proposed redlined suggestions to afford greater flexibility while ensuring transparency, compliance with Sunshine and Open Meeting laws, and civic participation. Please refer to recently [adopted Council rule amendment to Rule 5.01](#) that would conform with proposed change to Charter Section 4.10.

In addition to the highlighted language, Commissioners are directed to the second paragraph requiring Council to hold two meetings per calendar month. While City Council has adapted to a reduced summer schedule by consolidating Committee of the Whole meetings on the same night as Regular Council meetings, many communities recognize a summer recess. A change may not be necessary at this time, but this call-out is submitted for your awareness and consideration.

**Proposed Revised Text:**

On January 2nd (if January 2nd is a Sunday, then on January 3rd) On or before January 7 of each year, Council shall convene and organize at the Council Chambers of the Municipality at a time to be determined by Council rules of procedure. The Mayor, or one appointed by the Mayor, shall preside as temporary chairperson only until the President of Council is elected.

Thereafter, Council shall meet at such times as may be prescribed by its own rules, regulations, bylaws, or by resolution or ordinance, except that it shall hold regular meetings at least twice during each calendar month.

All regular and special meetings of Council shall be held ~~at the~~ within Council Chambers. ~~However, unless the by motion at a preceding regular meeting, members of Council decide may determine~~ that a particular regular or special meeting ~~will be held in an alternate location. In the event the noticed meeting location becomes unavailable, the meeting may be relocated, and notice of the new location will be provided as soon as practical, may occasion a large public attendance which the Council Chambers would be unable to accommodate. In that case, Council may direct said meeting to be held in some other public or private place with larger accommodations, and shall direct that notice of the change of the meeting place be given by publication in a newspaper of local circulation at least one week before the said Council meeting is scheduled~~ In all

circumstances, all meetings of Council shall adhere to applicable Ohio Open Meetings and Sunshine statutes, this Charter, and its own rules regarding noticing meetings. (Amended Nov. 7, 2006.)

- **SECTION 4.11 - SPECIAL MEETINGS.**

**Current Text:**

Special meetings of the Council may be called as provided by its rules, regulations, bylaws, or by resolution or ordinance. In the absence of any such provisions, special meetings may be called by a vote of Council taken at any regular or special meeting thereof, or shall be called by the Clerk of Council **upon the written request of the Mayor, or the President of Council, or any three (3) members of Council.**

Notice of each such special meeting called at the request of the Mayor, President of Council, or three (3) members of Council, shall state the date and time, and subject or subjects to be considered, and no other subject or subjects shall be considered thereat. The Clerk of Council shall cause such notice to be served upon the Mayor and each member of Council not less than twenty-four (24) hours preceding the time for the meeting. In the event that a special meeting is called by a vote of Council taken at any regular or special meeting from which any member of Council is absent, notice of such special meeting shall be given such absentee in the manner and form hereinbefore provided and the Mayor and any Council member shall be deemed conclusively to have waived such notice by his/her attendance at any such meeting. (Amended Nov. 6, 2007.)

**Commentary:**

Council recently updated its rules to ensure that the City Attorney also had authority to convene a Special Meeting ([See 5.03](#)). An amendment to align the second paragraph of Charter Section 4.11 would allow consistency, and ensure equitable balance among three branches.

The Rule change is appropriate because one of the more common reasons to call an executive session is to discuss pending or imminent litigation with the City Attorney. Executive sessions must be on the agenda of a regular or special meeting, and cannot be held during a Committee meeting. As such, it would be appropriate to enable the City Attorney to call a special meeting as part of a request to hold an executive session.

**Proposed Revised Text:**

Special meetings of the Council may be called as provided by its rules, regulations, bylaws, or by resolution or ordinance. In the absence of any such provisions, special meetings may be called by a vote of Council taken at any regular or special meeting thereof, or shall be called by the Clerk of Council upon the written request of the Mayor, **City Attorney**, or the President of Council, or any three (3) members of Council.

Notice of each such special meeting ~~called at the request of the Mayor, President of Council, or three (3) members of Council,~~ shall state the date and time, and subject or subjects to be considered, and no other subject or subjects shall be considered thereat. ~~In addition to compliance with Open Meetings statutes and other applicable laws and rules, F~~the Clerk of Council shall ~~cause such notice to be served upon~~provide the notice to the Mayor, **City Attorney**, and each member of Council by normal method of communication not less than twenty-four (24) hours preceding the time for the meeting. ~~In the event that a special meeting is called by a vote of Council taken at any regular or special meeting from which any member of Council is absent, notice of such special meeting shall be given such absentee in the manner and form hereinbefore provided and the Mayor and any Council member shall be deemed conclusively to have waived such notice by his/her attendance at any such meeting.~~ (Amended Nov. 6, 2007.)

- **SECTION 4.12 - LEGISLATIVE PROCEDURE**

**Commentary:**

A minor revision may be appropriate to align language and reduce potential confusion. The final clause of the first sentence of this section appears to be modeled from Robert's Rules of Order but is unnecessary and confusing. However, if this requires a separate ballot item, this may not be worth advancing.

**Proposed Revised Text:**

Four (4) members of Council shall constitute a quorum to ~~transact~~ conduct business, ~~but a lesser number may adjourn from time to time.~~

All legislative action of Council shall be in the manner prescribed by the Constitution and the statute laws of the State of Ohio, and as further provided in this Charter. Any formal resolution or ordinance must be introduced in written or printed form, which shall contain no more than one (1) subject, which subject shall be clearly expressed in its title.

No ordinance or formal resolution or section thereof shall be revised or amended, unless the new ordinance or resolution contains the entire ordinance or resolution or section revised or amended and a repeal of the original ordinance, resolution, section or sections so amended.

An affirmative vote of at least four (4) members of Council shall be required for the enactment of every resolution or ordinance, unless a larger number be required by the provisions of this Charter.

Every ordinance shall be read by title at two (2) different Council meetings, unless Council votes to suspend this rule. Such suspension of the rules shall require the affirmative vote of at least six (6) members of Council if all members are present, or the affirmative vote of at least five (5) members if one or more members are absent. If this rule is suspended in accordance with the foregoing provisions, then the ordinance shall be read by title once before the passage.

No action of Council authorizing the surrender or joint exercise of any of its powers or in granting any franchise shall be enacted under a suspension of this rule.

Members of Council shall vote in the affirmative or negative on all matters coming on for vote at a regular or special meeting of Council. A member of Council may abstain from a vote on such matters but only upon stating on the public record that the reason for such abstention is a conflict of interest on the matter to be voted upon. The basis for such conflict need not be stated. Any member not complying with this provision shall be immediately informed of this provision by the Clerk of Council or the City Attorney. Should the member of Council not immediately change the Council member's abstention vote or state that basis of the abstention is a conflict of interest, the member of Council shall be considered to have removed himself/herself from office, and the filling of the vacancy so created shall be governed by [Section 4.08](#) of this Charter. (Amended Nov. 3, 1981.) (Amended Nov. 7, 2006.)

- **SECTION 4.13 - LEGISLATIVE PROCEDURE**

**Current Text:**

Public notice, as required by law, or by this Charter, or by ordinance, shall be given for resolutions and ordinances by requiring the Clerk to post them for thirty (30) days after passage by Council in a conspicuous place in the Municipal building. (Amended Nov. 6, 2007.)

**Commentary:**

Utilizing relevant communication technology is valuable and relevant, but we should exercise caution when inscribing prescriptive and constraining tactics into the Charter.

Currently, public notice of adopted legislation is physically posted in City Hall, and a legislative journal is circulated by email to elected officials and directors. Legislation is all housed through the City’s Legistar page, and legislation is posted on City Council’s webpage. Consider advancing language that addresses desired impact or outcome, ensuring multi-modal communication, and process that allow flexibility both for those implementing the section and those it is intended to benefit.

The screenshot shows a web browser window with the URL [gahanna.gov/588/Council-Member-Updates](http://gahanna.gov/588/Council-Member-Updates). The page features a navigation menu with links for "Our Government", "Departments", "Our Community", "How Do I...", and "Connect with Us". A sidebar on the left contains links for "Events", "Facilities", "Utility Bills", "Permits", and "Service Requests". The main content area lists four items:

- **MT-0006-2026**  
A MOTION TO APPROVE SEASONAL EMPLOYMENT OF CARIS LANTZ AS COUNCIL OFFICE INTERN THROUGH THE MID-OHIO REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION (MORPC) SUMMER INTERNSHIP PROGRAM AT A RATE OF \$15.99 PER HOUR.  
*Passed February 16, 2026; Effective February 16, 2026*
- **MT-0007-2026**  
A MOTION TO APPOINT EVAN ECOS TO THE CIVIL SERVICE COMMISSION, SEAT 4, AND FAIR HOUSING BOARD, SEAT 1, UNEXPIRED TERMS ENDING DECEMBER 31, 2027.  
*Passed February 16, 2026; Effective February 16, 2026*
- **MT-0008-2026**  
A MOTION TO SUSPEND COUNCIL RULES OF PROCEDURE SECTION 5.20 TO ADOPT AN ALTERNATIVE REGULAR MEETING SCHEDULE IN APRIL FOR THE RELOCATION TO THE NEW GAHANNA CIVIC CENTER AS FOLLOWS: Final Regular City Council Meeting at 200 S. Hamilton Road is April 6, 2026 at 7:00 PM; Committee of the Whole Meeting scheduled for April 13, 2026 is canceled; Regular City Council Meeting scheduled for April 20, 2026 is canceled; First Regular City Council Meeting at 825 Tech Center Drive is April 27, 2026 at 7:00 PM, immediately followed by Committee of the Whole.  
*Passed February 16, 2026; Effective February 16, 2026*
- **ORD-0005-2026**  
AN ORDINANCE AUTHORIZING SUPPLEMENTAL APPROPRIATIONS - Central Park TIF Fund, General Fund and



## City of Gahanna

200 South Hamilton Road  
Gahanna, Ohio 43230

### File Summary

**Criteria: Matter Final Action Begin Date: 2/1/2026, Matter Final Action End Date: 2/28/2026, Matter Status: Passed, Matter Type: Resolution**

| File Number   | Title  | Status                         |
|---------------|--|--------------------------------|
| RES-0002-2026 | Resolution   | Passed                         |
|               | A JOINT RESOLUTION AND PROCLAMATION RECOGNIZING FEBRUARY 2026 AS "BLACK HISTORY MONTH" AND HONORING THE LEGACY OF CORA THURMAN                             |                                |
|               | Introduced: 1/22/2026  | Controlling Body: City Council |
| RES-0003-2026 | Resolution   | Passed                         |
|               | A RESOLUTION AUTHORIZING THE MAYOR TO ENTER INTO A CONTRACT AMENDMENT WITH FISHBECK FOR THE TAYLOR ROAD WATERLINE REPLACEMENT PROJECT (ST-1121 / WA-24-01) |                                |
|               | Introduced: 1/22/2026  | Controlling Body: City Council |