



City of Gahanna

200 S. Hamilton Road
Gahanna, Ohio 43230

Meeting Minutes

Charter Review

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, March 26, 2026

6:30 PM

Council Chambers, City Hall

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

Chair Barnhardt called the regular meeting of the Gahanna Charter Review Commission to order on March 26, 2026, at 6:30 p.m. and led members in the Pledge of Allegiance. The agenda was published on March 20, 2026.

Present 7 - Ethan Barnhardt, Jamie Belisle, Edward A. Hill Jr., Richard Maxwell, Raymond J. Mularski, Karen Reynolds, and Carrin Wester

B. ADDITIONS OR CORRECTIONS TO THE AGENDA.

None.

C. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES.

[2026-0063](#)

Charter Review Commission Minutes 2026-03-12

A motion was made by Mularski, seconded by Belisle, that the Minutes be Approved. The motion carried by the following vote:

Yes: 7 - Barnhardt, Belisle, Hill, Maxwell, Mularski, Reynolds and Wester

D. PUBLIC COMMENT.

Pursuant to Rule 7.4.1, visitors are welcome to address the Commission by completing a speaker slip; being recognized by the Chair; stating their name, address, and the purpose of their comments; and speaking for up to three minutes. This time limitation shall prevail unless extended by the Chair without opposition from a Commission member.

Chair Barnhardt opened public comment and explained the procedures and time limits.

Pat Francisco, 234 Shull Avenue, Gahanna, OH, addressed the Commission regarding the use of a golf cart on city streets. Francisco stated that she had operated the golf cart for several years after being told no ordinance prohibited it, but police later stopped her and informed her that she could no longer operate it. She explained that the golf cart met street-legal requirements, including mirrors, turn signals, brake lights, and a license plate, and she expressed uncertainty about what had changed.

Chair Barnhardt referred the matter to the City Attorney for clarification. City Attorney Tamilarasan explained that the issue fell under the traffic code within city ordinances rather than the charter. She stated that she was currently conducting an annual review of the criminal and traffic code and offered to provide her contact information to Francisco to discuss the matter further. Francisco agreed and thanked her.

The Clerk confirmed that no additional speaker slips were submitted, and Chair Barnhardt closed public comment.

E. NEW BUSINESS.

1. Presentation from City Council Members, Board & Commission Members

City Councilmember Michael Schnetzer

Chair Barnhardt invited City Councilmember Michael Schnetzer to speak first. Schnetzer thanked the Commission for the opportunity to present and expressed appreciation for the Commissioners' service, noting the significant time commitment and the importance of participation in self-governance.

Councilmember Schnetzer continued his presentation by explaining that he organized his remarks into two broad categories: provisions that should remain unchanged and those that might warrant amendment. He began by discussing the City's current governance structure, which he stated functioned effectively. He noted his experience serving a fourth term on City Council and nearly two decades in municipal finance, during which his firm underwrote thousands of municipal project financings. Based on that experience, he stated that no objective evidence demonstrated that one form of governance produced better financial or

community outcomes than another. He emphasized the importance of self-governance and expressed his view that Gahanna's current structure represented an effective and balanced system. Schnetzer described the organizational structure of the City as outlined in the charter, explaining that executive departments reported to the Mayor, while City Council served as the legislative branch with both ward and at-large representation. He stated that this structure allowed residents to elect representatives while maintaining geographic balance. He further explained that all branches of government ultimately reported to and were chosen by the residents, which maximized voter influence under the strong mayor system. Schnetzer compared the current structure to a council-manager form of government, explaining that such a system would place executive authority under City Council and reduce direct accountability to residents. He stated that this change would increase Council's power and could disrupt the existing balance. He added that if the Commission considered such a transition, it should also consider reducing Council terms from four years to two years to increase responsiveness to voters, noting that two-year terms existed historically prior to a change made around 2013 or 2014.

Councilmember Schnetzer then addressed provisions he believed warranted review. He identified Article 22, which governs the Charter Review Commission, as unusual due to the frequency of required reviews. He compared this to state constitutional conventions, which occur infrequently and typically address limited topics. He noted that Gahanna had conducted multiple charter reviews since 1996 and had adopted 123 amendments over the City's history, which he contrasted with the 27 amendments to the United States Constitution. He expressed concern that frequent reviews created a risk of unintended consequences and cited the cost of a recent mayoral primary election, which exceeded \$300,000, as an example of a costly outcome from a prior amendment. Schnetzer suggested that the Commission consider eliminating the requirement to convene a Charter Review Commission every five years and instead allow reviews on an as-needed basis or limit their scope to specific sections identified by Council. He stated that such changes could reduce the risk of costly or unintended amendments.

Councilmember Schnetzer recommended reviewing Section 4.12 regarding abstentions and removal, stating that it appeared inconsistent with Section 4.07 concerning due process. He suggested that the

Commission consider aligning those sections.

Councilmember Schnetzer also addressed discussion about incorporating a strategic plan into the charter and cautioned against doing so. He stated that strategic plans required significant financial investment and were better suited for the ordinance process rather than the charter. He suggested that the Commission consider requiring periodic performance audits instead, noting that the Ohio Auditor of State's office offered such audits and that they often identified cost savings sufficient to offset their expense. Councilmember Schnetzer concluded his prepared remarks and offered to answer questions. Chair Barnhardt thanked him for his comments and invited questions from the Commission.

Commissioner Mularski asked Schnetzer to provide a copy of his notes for distribution.

Vice Chair Wester asked Schnetzer to clarify whether he believed no objective data demonstrated that one form of government was superior or whether he believed the form of government had minimal influence on outcomes. Councilmember Schnetzer responded that he believed the form of government had little influence on outcomes. He explained that, based on his professional experience, he had observed no correlation between a municipality's form of government and its financial performance or bond rating. He stated that while subjective preferences might guide decisions about governance structures, objective data did not demonstrate that one form consistently produced better results. He reiterated that Gahanna's current structure maximized resident input in governance.

Chair Barnhardt asked, in Councilmember Schnetzer's opinion, what governance factors influenced financial success. Schnetzer identified factors that contributed to stronger financial performance. He emphasized the importance of sound financial policies, including maintaining reserve funds for emergencies, dedicating revenue for capital improvements, and avoiding deferred liabilities. He also highlighted the value of prudent budgeting practices, including multi-year financial planning, and noted that external factors such as geographic limitations and state-imposed obligations could also affect a municipality's financial condition. Chair Barnhardt asked whether

extending the Charter Review Commission cycle to ten years, rather than eliminating a timeframe altogether, would be appropriate. Schnetzer responded that the decision rested with the Commission and reiterated his concern that frequent charter reviews increased the likelihood of unintended consequences. He explained that reducing the frequency of changes could lower the risk of costly errors. Schnetzer suggested that a potential compromise could involve limiting the scope of charter reviews rather than conducting comprehensive reviews each time. He proposed that City Council could identify specific sections or topics for review within enabling legislation, similar to how state constitutional conventions often focus on targeted issues rather than entire governing documents. He stated that such an approach could allow for necessary updates while reducing systemic risk.

Commissioner Mularski asked how a charter review process would be initiated if it were no longer required to occur automatically.

Councilmember Schnetzer responded that the Commission could establish a process within the charter, suggesting that City Council, administration, or the City Attorney could raise a concern during a Council meeting. He stated that Council could then determine whether sufficient support existed to convene a Charter Review Commission and define its scope. Mr. Mularski asked for clarification on whether City Council would initiate the process through ordinance with mayoral approval. Schnetzer agreed and stated that such a process would remain public and follow due process, ensuring transparency and awareness.

City Attorney Tamilarasan addressed the Commission and stated that the charter already provided multiple methods for amendment. She explained that Council could place a charter amendment before voters by an affirmative vote, that citizens could initiate amendments through petition, and that the Charter Review Commission convened every five years. She noted that these mechanisms created redundancy and provided several avenues for review. She also stated that Council could create ad hoc commissions or committees by ordinance when necessary and that the Commission could consider whether certain functions belonged in the charter or in ordinance.

Chair Barnhardt asked if there were any additional questions. Hearing none, he thanked Council Member Schnetzer for his presentation.

Sarah Pollyea, Planning Commission Member

Planning Commission Chair Sarah Pollyea addressed the Commission and thanked members for the opportunity to speak. She provided background on her long-standing connection to Gahanna, her legal career, and her involvement in the community, including her leadership roles on the Planning Commission and other local boards. She emphasized her commitment to public service and the community. Pollyea stated that her proposals aimed to improve clarity, transparency, and consistency within the charter without altering the City's existing form of government. She explained that Gahanna's charter established legislative authority with City Council and executive authority with the Mayor, and her recommendations sought to clarify how those branches interacted in matters involving public assets, development agreements, zoning decisions, and significant financial obligations. Pollyea stated that her proposals aligned with practices in comparable municipalities and reflected processes already occurring in practice. She identified four areas for consideration: Council approval of real estate transactions, Council oversight of development agreements, transparency in zoning decisions, and Council authorization of major contracts. Noting that she would provide additional written materials for the record, Pollyea continued her presentation by stating that her proposals centered on ensuring that significant decisions involving public assets, long-term development commitments, and major financial obligations followed a clear and transparent structure.

Ms. Pollyea explained that her first proposal addressed real estate transactions involving City-owned land. She stated that the City already presented significant transactions to Council for approval and that her proposal would codify this practice in the charter by requiring Council approval for the purchase, sale, or transfer of such property. She then discussed development agreements, noting that these often involved long-term commitments related to infrastructure, land use, or economic development. She stated that these agreements typically came before Council and proposed clarifying in the charter that agreements involving City-owned land or significant municipal commitments should continue to receive legislative review. Pollyea next addressed transparency in zoning decisions. She stated that while Gahanna already maintained a strong zoning review process, her proposal would require that the basis for zoning decisions be clearly stated on the record, including factors such

as consistency with the comprehensive plan and compatibility with surrounding land uses. She then discussed Council authorization of major contracts. She explained that while the Mayor executed contracts and the budgeting process authorized expenditures, her proposal would clarify when additional Council authorization would be required for larger contractual commitments, based on thresholds established by ordinance. She emphasized that this would not affect routine administrative purchasing. Pollyea addressed potential questions, stating that although Council already approved many of these actions, codifying the practices in the charter would ensure consistency rather than reliance on custom. She stated that the proposals would not slow operations because they applied only to significant matters and would not interfere with routine administration. She further explained that the charter should reflect the structure of authority and that her proposals would not diminish the Mayor's executive role but would clarify when legislative authorization was appropriate. Pollyea summarized that her proposals promoted clarity, consistency, and transparency and reflected practices already in place.

Planning Commissioner Pollyea then introduced additional proposals related to Section 11.02 and the Planning Commission, based on her experience as Chair. She explained that the current attendance requirement used a fixed number of missed meetings as a basis for removal, which did not account for changes in meeting frequency. She proposed replacing this with a percentage-based requirement, such as attending at least 75 percent of meetings, to ensure consistency. Pollyea next addressed consecutive absences, stating that automatic removal after a set number of missed meetings could create unintended consequences. She proposed eliminating automatic removal based solely on consecutive absences and instead evaluating overall participation. She also noted that the charter referenced excused absences without defining the term, which created ambiguity. She proposed allowing the Planning Commission to define excused absences through its own policies, with general guidance including illness, family emergencies, or work obligations. Pollyea further addressed removal for just cause, stating that the charter did not clearly define the term or identify who determined it. She proposed clarifying that the appointing authority would handle removal and that the process would include general guidance and due process protections such as notice and an opportunity to respond. Pollyea concluded that her proposals

would not reduce accountability but would improve flexibility, consistency, and fairness. She then offered to answer questions.

Commissioner Hill thanked Pollyea for her presentation and asked her to clarify what she meant by “significant” in the context of financial and policy decisions. Pollyea responded that she did not propose a specific definition and suggested leaving that determination to the Commission or establishing flexible standards through ordinance. She stated that the term generally referred to actions beyond routine administrative matters, such as larger purchases or development agreements. Commissioner Hill asked a follow-up question to clarify whether the term “significant” had been previously defined and whether a new definition would represent a change in practice. Pollyea responded that she had not identified any existing definition and intentionally kept the term broad to preserve flexibility, stating that she did not want to include language in the charter that would require frequent amendments to adjust definitions over time. Commissioner Hill then asked Ms. Pollyea to clarify her reference to participation as a measure in attendance considerations. Pollyea stated that participation would include being prepared, asking thoughtful questions, and making meaningful contributions, as opposed to merely being present. Hill expressed concern that such language could introduce subjectivity into the charter without clear standards for measurement. Pollyea acknowledged the concern and suggested that the appointing authority could evaluate participation when making determinations.

Commissioner Mularski asked for Pollyea’s perspective on a prior proposal to eliminate the Board of Zoning and Building Appeals (BZBA). Pollyea stated that she generally supported the idea, explaining that the appeal process might not need to go through BZBA and that the board did not meet frequently. She suggested that appeals could instead be directed to municipal or common pleas court rather than having one board oversee another.

Commissioner Reynolds asked whether removing BZBA might concern the community by reducing opportunities for public involvement. Pollyea responded that improved efficiency could benefit the community and noted that residents would still have other opportunities to serve in different capacities.

Commissioner Belisle acknowledged Ms. Pollyea’s involvement with the

community, and asked Pollyea whether she supported including a strategic plan in the charter. Pollyea stated that she did not favor that approach, citing cost and the need for flexibility, and agreed that such matters would be better addressed through ordinance.

Commissioner Mularski asked Ms. Pollyea to explain the difference between the Property Appeals Board and BZBA. Pollyea explained that the Property Appeals Board primarily handled sidewalk program appeals and met infrequently. She noted that the board had limited activity and that she was less familiar with the full scope of BZBA's responsibilities, though she understood it reviewed appeals from Planning Commission decisions. City Attorney Tamilarasan provided additional clarification, stating that the Property Appeals Board was created by ordinance and primarily handled sidewalk appeals, along with appeals related to nuisance abatement and rental property registration. She explained that most appeals involved sidewalk issues and that many cases were resolved prior to formal hearings through communication and settlement. She noted that ordinance-based boards allowed flexibility for Council to modify processes as needed.

Commissioner Hill asked whether Planning Commission members received compensation. Pollyea confirmed that the positions were paid.

Vice Chair Wester asked Ms. Pollyea to clarify her earlier reference to comparable communities, including Dublin, Upper Arlington, and Westerville. Pollyea confirmed those examples and stated that she would provide additional materials for the record. Vice Chair Wester noted that those communities operated under a council-manager form of government and asked whether Pollyea had identified any strong mayor municipalities with similar charter provisions. Pollyea responded that she had not and acknowledged that those provisions reflected process details that could vary based on the form of government. Vice Chair Wester then asked about Planning Commission rules and whether the Commission adopted its own rules annually. Ms. Pollyea explained that while the Commission could adopt rules, the charter limited flexibility because certain requirements, such as attendance thresholds, remained fixed regardless of changes in meeting frequency. Vice Chair Wester asked whether the charter defined excused absences. Pollyea stated that it did not and explained that the lack of definition created challenges, particularly when members experienced temporary life circumstances

that affected attendance. She stated that clearer guidance could help prevent the loss of members who might otherwise continue to serve. Vice Chair Wester asked whether definitions for excused absences could be addressed through Commission rules rather than the charter. Pollyea responded that while rules could address the issue, she believed the charter should provide a framework, including clearer definitions or guidance, while allowing the appointing authority to make determinations in specific cases.

Commissioner Belisle asked who currently determined whether an absence was excused. Pollyea stated that no formal determination existed and that attendance was simply recorded based on whether a member was present.

Chair Barnhardt asked how other communities approached attendance and excused absence policies. Pollyea stated that comparisons were difficult because Gahanna's Planning Commission differed from those in other jurisdictions in structure and responsibilities, making direct comparisons challenging. Chair Barnhardt asked whether the charter should remain prescriptive or delegate more authority to commissions. Pollyea stated that she supported a balanced approach, recommending that the charter provide clearer guidance and definitions while allowing commissions to adopt additional rules. She emphasized that charter provisions would establish a consistent framework for future commissions, while rules could provide further detail and flexibility. Chair Barnhardt then asked Pollyea to further explain her proposal regarding zoning decisions and the requirement to include the basis for those decisions in the record. Pollyea stated that her intent was to increase transparency by ensuring that residents could clearly understand the rationale behind zoning and land use decisions, particularly for those affected by them. Chair Barnhardt asked whether such a requirement could also provide legal protection by documenting the reasoning behind decisions. Pollyea responded that her primary focus was on transparency rather than legal considerations, emphasizing the importance of making decision-making processes more understandable to the public.

Vice Chair Wester asked whether existing public meetings and opportunities for public comment already provided sufficient transparency. Pollyea acknowledged that meetings were public but

stated that a clear, summarized explanation in the record would provide an additional and more accessible way for residents to understand decisions without needing to review full meeting discussions. Vice Chair Wester expressed some confusion, noting that Planning Commission and City Council already voted publicly on zoning matters. Ms. Pollyea clarified that Planning Commission made recommendations to Council, which then made final decisions, and reiterated that her proposal would provide a clearer summary of the reasoning behind those decisions. Vice Chair Wester asked whether Pollyea's proposal reflected a broader goal of improving communication within the charter. Pollyea confirmed that her intent focused on clarity and making information easier for residents to access and understand.

Chair Barnhardt asked whether similar requirements existed in the charters of other municipalities such as Upper Arlington, Westerville, or Dublin. Pollyea stated that some of those communities included such provisions and indicated that she would provide example language for the Commission's review. Chair Barnhardt asked for any additional questions.

Commissioner Maxwell commented that while he understood the intent, he viewed the proposal as potentially redundant because information was already available to the public. Pollyea acknowledged that the proposals reflected her perspective and stated that she deferred to the Commission's judgment on whether to pursue them.

Chair Barnhardt thanked Pollyea for her presentation and expressed appreciation for her thoughtful comments and suggestions. He indicated that the Commission looked forward to reviewing the additional materials Pollyea would provide. Pollyea thanked the Commission and concluded her remarks.

2. Proposal Inventory Review

[2026-0050](#)

Draft Charter Amendment Proposals for Charter Review Commission 2026

Chair Barnhardt explained that a list of proposals received to date would be updated to include items discussed during the meeting and received via email the prior week. Vice Chair Wester thanked Chair Barnhardt for organizing the information and stated that it would assist in future review.

F. CORRESPONDENCE AND ACTIONS.

[2026-0061](#)

Charter Review Commission Correspondence Received via Clerk

File noted for the record. No discussion for Commission correspondence and actions.

G. POLL MEMBERS FOR COMMENT.

Chair Barnhardt announced that the next meeting was scheduled for April 9, 2026, and stated that additional City Council and board or commission members would be invited to present. He noted that City Councilmember Merisa Bowers had confirmed attendance. Clerk VanMeter stated that no others had confirmed at that time.

H. ADJOURNMENT.

With no further business before the Charter Review Commission, Chair Barnhardt adjourned the meeting at 7:38 p.m.

Jeremy A. VanMeter
Clerk of Council

*APPROVED by the Charter Review, this
day of 2026.*

Ethan Barnhardt