

To: City of Gahanna Charter Review Commissioners
cc: City Council Clerk VanMeter, City Attorney Tamilarasan
From: Jamille Jones, City Council, Member At Large
Date: April 9, 2026
Re: Recommended Amendments to the City of Gahanna Charter

I am submitting these comments for the Charter Review Commission's consideration as a council and community member who is deeply invested in this city's future and who believes that our foundational governing documents should reflect not just who we are today, but who we are becoming.

My goal in speaking with you tonight is to make the case for *why* these changes are worth pursuing, the *what* and *how* I trust to the commission under guidance of the City Attorney.

SECTION 4.10 — REGULAR MEETINGS: Meeting Location and Public Notice

Current Text: "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.)

I want to note that this recommendation is consistent with and supportive of the amendment proposed by Councilwoman Bowers, who has already raised this for the Commission's consideration. I offer these comments as an affirmation of that direction and to add a community perspective on why this change matters beyond the mechanics of meeting administration.

Council and administration are, at their best, a team working together in service of the same community. Sustaining high performing team requires intentional realignment. That kind of reset is most effective when it happens in a neutral space, somewhere that feels less like "work" and more like an opportunity to step back, reconnect, and recalibrate together (e.g. team building retreat at an offsite location). Having the option to do so codified in the Charter removes a barrier and sends a signal that intentional team development is a legitimate and valued function of governance.

Beyond team development, this change also offers meaningful flexibility for community engagement, the ability to hold a meeting or town hall in a neighborhood, a community center, or a school gymnasium sends a message to residents that their participation is not contingent on their ability to get to a specific building. That matters, particularly for residents who are most often absent from formal civic processes not by choice, but by circumstance.

All Ohio Sunshine Law and Open Meetings requirements remain fully in effect regardless of where a meeting is held. This is about expanding the where that meeting can take place.

Proposed Text: All regular and special meetings of Council shall be held within Council Chambers. However, by motion at a preceding regular meeting, members of Council may vote to hold a regular or special meeting at 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. 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.

SECTION 22.01 — CHARTER REVIEW COMMISSION: Composition and Term

Current Text: “In January, 1996, and each five (5) years thereafter, there shall be appointed a commission of seven (7) qualified electors...”

I understand the argument that five-year review cycles may be more frequent than neighboring municipalities practice. That comparison is worth hearing. But I’d also ask us to sit with the counterargument before moving to simply eliminate.

Imagine the change that can happen in five years...five years ago, we were in the middle of a global pandemic that changed how government functions, how communities gather, and what residents need from their city. Five years from now, Gahanna is expected to experience significant regional growth that will reshape our population, our infrastructure, and our priorities.

Rather than locking us into a rigid longer cycle or eliminating automatic convening entirely, I urge the Commission to consider flexible language that establishes a maximum interval while preserving the ability to convene sooner when circumstances warrant. For example, a provision stating review shall occur “*not less frequently than every ten (10) years*” offers the flexibility to respond to moments that demand it, without mandating reviews when they aren’t needed.

This is about building a governing document that can grow with us, not one that either mandates constant revision or forecloses the opportunity to revisit when it matters most.

SECTIONS 3.02, 4.03, AND 10.02 — CONSISTENCY OF QUALIFICATIONS FOR ELECTED OFFICE

As raised by CRC Vice Chair Wester, the Charter currently establishes three different residency and qualification standards for its three elected offices, and they do not align with one another. The Mayor must be a continuously qualified elector for two years prior to the primary election. Council candidates must meet a fifteen-month standard prior to the general election. The City Attorney need only be an elector at the time of filing, with no durational requirement at all.

I fully support a charter amendment to address this inconsistency and lean towards 15 months across all three offices. Inconsistency in our foundational document creates confusion and invites the appearance of unequal standards for public service.

SECTION 23.07 — NON-DISCRIMINATION CLAUSE

Current Text: "No appointed or elected official and no employee of the City of Gahanna in discharging their duties under the City Charter, Administrative Code, or rules shall discriminate against any person or group on the basis of age, gender, race, color, marital status, disability, religion, sexual orientation, national origin, or status as a covered veteran in accordance with applicable federal, state and local laws. Elected or appointed officials, or classified or unclassified employees shall not use age, gender, race, color, marital status, disability, religion, sexual orientation, national origin or status as a covered veteran in accordance with applicable federal, state and local laws as a basis to limit the use or availability of any public resource." (Amended Nov. 7, 2006.)

Current Equal Employment Opportunity statement: “The City of Gahanna is committed to the principle of equal employment opportunity for all employees and to providing employees with a work environment free of discrimination and harassment. All employment decisions at the City of Gahanna are based on business needs, job requirements and individual qualifications, without regard to race; color; religion or belief; national, social or ethnic origin; sex (including pregnancy); age; physical, mental or sensory disability; HIV status; sexual orientation; gender identity and/or expression; marital, civil union or domestic partnership status; past or present military service; family medical history or genetic information; family or parental status; or any other status protected by law. The City of Gahanna will not tolerate discrimination or harassment based on any of these characteristics. The City of Gahanna encourages applicants of all ages.”

The non-discrimination clause in Section 23.07 is one of the most important provisions in the Charter in that it outlines who this city commits to serving and protecting. Its broad application to any person or group is a genuine strength worth naming.

That said, placing the Charter's language alongside the City's own Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) statement reveals a meaningful gap. The city's administrative practice already reflects a broader, more current set of protected characteristics. The Charter should align.

Proposed Revisions: At minimum, I recommend following revisions, consistent with the City's EEO statement and several sections of city code, including housing and criminal provisions, as referenced by City Attorney Tamilarasan at the April 9 CRC meeting:

Current Charter	Proposed Revision
Gender	Gender identity and/or expression
Sex	Sex (including pregnancy)
Covered veteran status	Past or present military service
Religion	Religion or belief
National origin	national, social, or ethnic origin
NA	“or any other status protected by law.”

Additional Context

- "Sex (including pregnancy)" matters because courts have historically ruled that pregnancy discrimination is not sex discrimination, since not all women are pregnant. The U.S. Supreme Court took that position in *General Electric Co. v. Gilbert* (1976). Congress responded by passing the Pregnancy Discrimination Act of 1978, explicitly amending Title VII to close that loophole. The parenthetical encodes that history. Leaving it out leaves the door open.

- "Gender identity" matters for the same reason. Federal courts have recognized that "sex" and "gender identity" are legally distinct terms as the Supreme Court addressed directly in *Bostock v. Clayton County* (2020). Because the national legal landscape on this question remains actively contested, explicit local language is essential so that we're not relying on shifting federal interpretation.

In conclusion, the City has already done the work of articulating a comprehensive, modern non-discrimination commitment in its administrative practice. The Charter should reflect that same commitment.

Thank you for the time and care you are giving to this process. I welcome the opportunity for questions or discussions.