



City of Ashtabula

Ashtabula City Council Work Session Agenda
Monday, January 6, 2025 at 5:30 PM
4230 Lake Avenue, Ashtabula, OH 44004

Minutes

Opening of Work Session

Call to Order

The work session of the Ashtabula City Council was called to order at 5:30 p.m. by Council President Roskovics.

Roll Call

Members Present: President John Roskovics, Vice President Russell Simeone, Ward 1 Councilor Kym Foglio, Ward 2 Councilor Terence Guerriero, Ward 3 Councilor RoLesia Holman, Ward 4 Councilor Jodi Mills, Ward 5 Councilor Jane DiGiacomo

Absent: None.

Officers Present: City Manager James Timonere, City Solicitor Cecilia Cooper, Clerk of Council Stacy Millberg

Sunshine Law Certification

A quorum was established as defined by the Ashtabula City Council Rules of Order. The meeting met the requirements of the Ohio Sunshine Laws Open Meetings Act.

Welcome and Acknowledgement of Visitors

Panel Discussion

Council President Roskovics stated the agenda was compiled by one of the council members. There were no additions or corrections made to it as it was not sent out until late Friday afternoon. The article "Compassion with Results" is not being endorsed by City Council as a whole or the City of Ashtabula.

Debrief on all information received about homeless issue.

Ward 5 Councilor Jane DiGiacomo stated the homeless issue has been discussed at several meetings. Members of the public have expressed their concerns, but Council has not had an opportunity to discuss what they have heard. The purpose of the work session is to allow a discussion on the homelessness issue.

Ward 2 Councilor Terence Guerriero asked Ashtabula Police Department Officer Bruckman and Officer White where the homeless are staying now during the winter. Officer White stated many of them find abandoned houses and then light fires inside them to keep warm. This causes a safety risk for not only the first responders but the neighborhood.

Ward 1 Councilor Kym Foglio asked for an approximate number of homeless people currently in the City. Officer Bruckman stated there are 40 to 50 homeless people. The number changes every day.

Council Vice President Russell Simeone asked if the number of homeless has decreased at all. Officer Bruckman stated there is never a drastic decrease. It is a constant revolving number.

Ward 1 Councilor Kym Foglio if people want help, they can get it. There is help available to people experiencing economic hardships.

Ward 2 Councilor Terence Guerriero asked what percentage of homeless people have a chemical dependency. Officer Bruckman stated most homeless people have either a chemical dependency or some kind of mental illness. Most choose to live this way.

Council President John Roskovics stated it is difficult to understand why a person would choose to live that way. Officer White stated it is an easy lifestyle to get involved in with no responsibility or accountability.

City Manager James Timonere stated there are approximately 40 to 50 people that are homeless. Some of them cause issues within the community, but many times people assume certain people are homeless and they are not. The mental health issue is the root cause. It leads to drug addiction, self-medication, and eventually homelessness. The stories not being reported are the number of people in the community that have received assistance. The Planning and Community Development staff help people avoid eviction every week so they can stay in their homes. That does not include what Catholic Charities, Signature Health, Square One, the Samaritan House, or any of the other various entities are doing. If people want help, it is available. Some of the people that are visible all the time and give the impression of being homeless are not. They have apartments and live in the area but choose not to stay in their homes. The issue is 40 to 50 people. Half will accept help; the rest will need to be dealt with in other ways.

Ward 3 Councilor RoLesia Holman stated the news articles provided were helpful as it is important to see what other areas are experiencing and what they have tried. Ward 3 Councilor RoLesia Holman asked City Manager James Timonere if he would provide regular updates on what his staff is doing to address these issues, so residents do not assume nothing is being done.

Ward 5 Councilor Jane DiGiacomo stated collaboration is essential to addressing the issue.

City Manager James Timonere stated local social organizations meet every month. The people they are helping and the methods they are using help solve some of the problems, but he agreed with Ward 3 Councilor RoLesia Holman that the reporting of what is being done needs to be better.

Ward 5 Councilor Jane DiGiacomo stated the problem is more about severe untreated mental illness and untreated drug addiction than homelessness. The social service agencies assist those experiencing economic hardships. Ward 5 Councilor Jane DiGiacomo asked if conservatorships are an option in Ohio.

City Solicitor Cecilia Cooper stated there is a way to declare a person incompetent and determine the least restrictive placement for them. The process is difficult. City Solicitor Cecilia Cooper suggested speaking with Judge Albert Camplese and Magistrate Richard Dana about a program they are working on to assist people who cannot afford psychiatric care.

Ward 3 Councilor RoLesia Holman asked about the availability on the psychiatric floor at Ashtabula Regional Medical Center. City Manager James Timonere stated he believes beds are always available. Law enforcement officers have brought people to ARMC that they believed were a danger to themselves and others only to have them released. Officers have had some luck bringing individuals to University Hospitals Geneva Medical Center and using their behavioral health services for treatment. There are ongoing discussions with ARMC and other area agencies that address

mental health. City Solicitor Cecilia Cooper stated if drug abuse is confirmed when an individual is taken to the emergency room, the hospital will not admit them to the psychiatric floor.

Council Vice President Russell Simeone discussed the City Manager James Timonere's idea of creating a central location where individuals can receive assistance from local social service agencies. Officer White stated most individuals do not want to get help. City Manager James Timonere stated people tend to decline assistance if they know they must follow rules to receive it. The idea behind the day center is to establish relationships between those needing assistance and the social service agencies so they will want to accept help. The day center would eliminate the transient aspect of receiving services and provide one place where individuals can get a hot meal, take a shower, do laundry and speak to any number of social service agencies about receiving further assistance.

City Manager James Timonere suggested City Council members attend some of the meetings of the various social service agencies to learn about what they are doing to address the issues.

City Manager James Timonere stated jail space at the local and county levels continues to be an issue as well. Many of the inmates at the Ashtabula City Jail are waiting to be transferred to the Ashtabula County Jail.

Ward 4 Councilor Jodi Mills stated building a relationship with people is important. It is difficult for people to make a change, but they must feel like they are doing it on their own.

Ward 2 Councilor Terence Guerriero suggested enacting legislation to give law enforcement officers the tools they need to deal with the issue. Officer White stated the legislation already exists. As an example, if a person commits a crime in Lake County, they are arrested and taken to jail. That is not the case in Ashtabula County due to the ongoing jail space issue. Ward 2 Councilor Terence Guerriero suggested meeting with county officials to discuss workable solutions.

Ward 3 Councilor RoLesia Holman stated she has heard people are profiting from the homeless. City Manager James Timonere stated there are people that are making a profit for providing rooms to homeless people and are often bringing people to Ashtabula from other communities to receive money for those rooms. A list of known boarding houses was sent to the Ashtabula County Building Department to ensure those establishments have obtained the proper building permits and are complying with the building codes.

Ward 5 Councilor Jane DiGiacomo suggested forming an ad hoc committee. City Manager James Timonere suggested attending the meetings of various local social service agencies before forming another committee.

"Compassion with Results" - What we can take from this plan and implement?

Questions/Comments

Discussion

Public Comment (at Council's discretion)

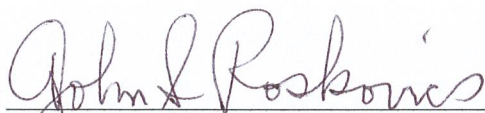
Adjournment

The work session was adjourned at 6:32 p.m. by Council President Roskovics.

DATE APPROVED:

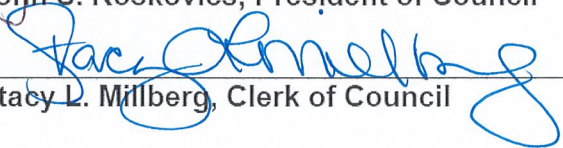
January 21, 2025

ATTESTED BY:



John S. Roskovics, President of Council

ATTESTED BY:



Stacy L. Millberg, Clerk of Council