



City of Ashtabula

Ashtabula City Council

Community Development/Economic Development/Parks & Recreation Committee Meeting

Wednesday, April 2, 2025 at 5:30 PM

Council Chambers

4230 Lake Avenue, Ashtabula, OH 44004

Minutes

Opening of Committee Meeting

Call to Order

The meeting of the Ashtabula City Council Community Development/ Economic Development/ Parks & Recreation Committee was called to order at 5:30 p.m. by Committee Chair DiGiacomo.

Roll Call

Members Present: **Chair:** Ward 5 Councilor Jane DiGiacomo, **Vice Chair:** Ward 4 Councilor Jodi Mills, Ward 3 Councilor RoLesia Holman

Absent: **Member:** None

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

Parks & Recreation Board Members Present: None

Visitor: Alex Iarocci, Executive Director Ashtabula County Landbank

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

Special Guest Presentation

Alex Iarocci, Executive Director Ashtabula County Land Bank

Alex Iarocci, Executive Director Ashtabula County Landbank, provided an update on the various projects the Landbank is working on. Since its inception in 2013, the Ashtabula County Landbank has demolished more than 300 vacant, abandoned, and deteriorated structures in the county, using \$6.5 million in state grant funding. The Landbank has acquired and sold 563 properties, adding \$5 million in market value back to the tax rolls and has completed three full property condition surveys to identify target investment areas in Conneaut, Ashtabula and Geneva. New housing challenges that the community is facing include an undersupply of housing as well as a growing affordability crisis. Some of the main reasons for these challenges include low production of single-family units, lack of newer apartments, missing middle housing, rising rents and wage stagnation, and increasing construction costs. The Landbank conducted a market analysis in 2021 to help guide where housing investments should be made. The analysis breaks down the type of housing needed as well as the amount of housing needed in each of the primary market areas. Ashtabula's primary market area needs up to 140 units of workforce apartments, which are units priced at 60 percent to 100 percent of the household area median income (AMI). In 2024, the AMI for a family of four in Ashtabula County was \$69,900. Ashtabula's primary market area also needs 50 for-sale units priced between

\$150,000 to \$249,000. Strategies the Landbank is using to meet the need or fill in the gap that the market is not responding to include the Wenner Field project. This project was financially feasible because the Landbank helped subsidize the cost of the development. The Landbank prepared the site; paid to demolish all the structures on the property, which amounted to \$75,000; and it is also taking care of stormwater mitigation the Ohio EPA is requiring, which will cost upwards of \$60,000. Those costs would normally be paid for by the developer. The result is 13 new single-family units in the Harbor. Three units have already been sold and there are several sales pending. Prices range from \$180,000 to \$260,000. The most recent project the Landbank is working on is being funded through the Welcome Home Ohio Grant. The Landbank received a \$750,000 grant to purchase three modular units. They are prefabricated homes, meaning 90 percent of the building is constructed in a factory and then shipped and fully assembled on the site in one to two days. The Landbank is partnering with a developer. Several vacant lots owned by the Landbank will be sold to the developer for \$10 each. The developer will then construct the modular units on those lots. The Landbank will use the grant funds to purchase the units from the developer and sell them to eligible buyers, according to the grant requirements. The price of the units cannot exceed \$180,000. Eligible buyers must have an annual income of less than or equal to 80 percent AMI. So, for a family of four, the annual household income cannot be higher than \$64,000. The buyer will be required to live in the residence for at least five years, agree to a 20-year affordability period and participate in financial literacy counseling.

There are currently 83 vacant lots under the control of the Landbank within the City. Mr. Iarocci offered some suggestions for the City to consider as it works to update its zoning code. Those suggestions include reducing setback requirements and minimum lot size, allowing smaller dwellings on tiny lots, and eliminating off-street parking requirements. These suggestions will help create more buildable lots. He also suggests the City upzone R-1 and R-2 districts for more density, allowing more single-family homes to be converted into duplexes or efficiency apartments, and permitting accessory dwelling units (ADUs). This will help create more middle housing.

Ward 4 Councilor Jodi Mills asked if tiny homes were an option for the smaller lots. Mr. Iarocci stated that a dwelling under 500 square feet would be considered a tiny home. Dwellings between 500 and 1,000 square feet are considered starter homes. He stated that tiny homes are not viable for people to live in for long periods of time. They are more of a transitional or situational option. Ward 4 Councilor Mills asked about constructing a tiny home on a property for a family member to live in, such as an elderly parent. City Manager James Timonere stated those are considered accessory dwelling units (ADUs). The City currently doesn't allow tiny homes to be built. There is a minimum square footage required to build in the City.

Committee Chair Jane DiGiacomo asked how the developer was selected. City Manager James Timonere stated there is a process that includes interviewing different firms to determine which one will be the best fit for the project.

Ward 4 Councilor Jodi Mills asked how people can apply for the income-based program. Mr. Iarocci stated the program is still in the early stages. The Landbank plans to conduct an aggressive marketing campaign to announce the program.

Committee Chair Jane DiGiacomo stated there are a lot of properties in her ward that have been vacant for years due to the owner either being deceased or in a nursing home. She asked if there was a way to prevent that from happening. Mr. Iarocci stated the proactive approach is estate planning. One of the biggest reasons properties sit vacant is that people do not have a will in place or families cannot afford the Probate Court process.

Mr. Iarocci stated that the rental market for market-rate apartments across Ashtabula County is at 99 percent occupancy, which indicates a huge demand. The ideal occupancy is 95 percent, so there is always a 5 percent vacancy rate.

City Manager's Report

City Manager James Timonere recently attended the Parks and Recreation Board meeting to give them an overview of the updates being made to City parks. The Public Works staff are back on first shift for the upcoming summer season. The staff were split during the winter months to provide nighttime coverage for snow plowing. The parks staff have requested to purchase a zero-turn lawn mower and a tractor to help maintain the parks. The request will be presented to City Council for consideration at the regular meeting April 7, 2025. The City is in the process of negotiating the contract with the YMCA for lifeguard coverage at Walnut Beach. The YMCA is requesting an additional \$3 to \$4 per hour for lifeguards and suggesting increasing the hours to 12 p.m. to 6 p.m. instead of 12 p.m. to 5 p.m. due to people still being at the beach when the lifeguards leave. Overall, it will be approximately a \$5,000 increase. The YMCA is also requesting compensation for placing buoys. The contract this year could be approximately \$25,000 rather than \$18,000 to \$19,000 as it has been in the past. Walnut Beach is the only beach in the county with lifeguards. The pavilion at Smith Field will be repaired once the weather permits. The City is still waiting for quotes to convert the last tennis court on Walnut Boulevard to a pickle ball court. The City received the estimate from the Ashtabula County Engineer's Office for the parking lot at the new Inclusion Park at Walnut Beach for ADA-accessible parking.

The deadline for firms to submit their Requests for Proposals and Requests for Qualifications for updating the City's Master Plan and zoning is April 4, 2025. The City Solicitor's Office has advised that moratoriums may be placed on certain things now that the Master Plan and zoning are being evaluated. City Manager James Timonere is suggesting placing temporary moratoriums on 12 specific things, including accessory structures over 200 square feet; addition treatment facilities including both inpatient and outpatient; auto and truck rentals; boarding or rooming housing unless they are certified by the Ohio Recovery Housing Board; check cashing and/or payday lending; convenience and/or dollar stores; e-cigarette; vaping and/or tobacco sales; food trucks with permanent locations; junkyards or scrapyards; motor vehicle fuel dispensing locations (gas stations); thrift and/or secondhand stores; and, used and/or new motor vehicle sales. The moratoriums will not apply to existing businesses in the City or any that have applied for permits and are waiting for approval.

Parks & Recreation Committee Report

Unfinished Business

A meeting has been scheduled with the merchants in the Harbor on April 16, 2025 to discuss the Designated Outdoor Refreshment Area (DORA). The DORA would give visitors of participating liquor establishments the option to purchase a beverage to-go and walk around the designated area and enter other participating businesses. It does not allow people to enter another liquor establishment with a drink. Merchants will have the option to participate.

New Business

Next Meeting

May 7, 2025

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 6:44 p.m. by Committee Chair Jane DiGiacomo.