



## **City of Ashtabula**

Ashtabula City Council

Community Development/Economic Development/Parks & Recreation Committee Meeting

Wednesday, August 6, 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 Jane DiGiacomo.

##### **Roll Call**

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

**Absent: Member:** None

**Officers Present:** City Manager James Timonere, Clerk of Council Stacy Millberg, Assistant City Solicitor Catherine Colgan

**Parks & Recreation Board Members Present:** None

**Visitors:** Steve Chase, Frank Brown, Doug Blenman

##### **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**

#### **City Manager's Report**

#### **Parks & Recreation Committee Report**

#### **Unfinished Business**

#### **Food Truck Legislation**

Discussion continued on food truck legislation. Assistant City Solicitor Catherine Colgan presented revised draft legislation to include suggestions received from committee members at previous meetings. At the request of City Manager James Timonere and committee members, the following revisions and clarifications were added to the legislation:

- Language clarifying that permits would expire on March 31st, the year following the date of issuance
- A permit would need to be displayed by food trucks
- Requiring food truck owners to obtain an FBI and BCI background check every two years, at their expense

- Allowing the City Manager to revoke or deny a permit if a food truck owner is convicted of a sexually oriented offense and/or a registered sex offender
- Limiting a food truck from taking up no more than two parking spaces

Motion: Committee Chair Jane DiGiacomo moved to bring the proposed food truck legislation out of committee for council's consideration; Ward 4 Councilor Jodi Mills seconded.

VOICE VOTE

Motion passed.

### **Small Box Retail Moratorium**

Discussion took place on revisions to the small box/retail moratorium that is in place. Committee Chair Jane DiGiacomo stated that regardless of how the committee decides to structure the legislation, she believes an exception should be made for the business owner that wants to open a convenient store at the corner of Woodman Avenue and Route 20. City Manager James Timonere stated that this moratorium was not targeted at this business owner. The original moratorium that was presented to the committee indicated the moratorium was for convenience and dollar stores; however, the Solicitor's Office changed it to small box/retail when the moratorium was separated into individual resolutions. He pointed out that within a 1.2-mile radius of the location in question, there are seven or eight similar stores.

City Manager James Timonere presented language developed by his office to better define small box/retail stores. After some discussion, the committee agreed on the following language: "Small-box retail / discount stores include the use of a building or structure, or a portion thereof, for the display and sale of merchandise that involves stocks of goods, wares or merchandise incidental to such purposes and is accessible to the public. Small-box retail / discount stores have a store footprint with a square footage of 2,500 to 8,000 sq/ft. and a retail focus that is the sale of goods used on an everyday basis by consumers, including, but not limited to, pre-packaged food products, household items, newspapers, magazines, tobacco and/or alcohol sales and sells at retail an assortment of physical goods, products or merchandise directly to the consumer. The product line includes food or beverages for off-premises consumption, personal grooming and health products, household goods and other consumer products that generally cost less than fifteen dollars (\$15.00)."

City Manager James Timonere stated the business in question, on Woodman Avenue and Route 20, would still have to apply for a variance through the Planning Commission before it would be able to open; however, it would be allowable under the proposed language, so long as the Planning Commission approves the variance.

Motion: Committee Chair Jane DiGiacomo moved to bring the proposed language for the small-box retail / discount stores moratorium out of committee for council's consideration; Ward 3 Councilor RoLesia Holman seconded.

VOICE VOTE

Motion passed.

City Manager James Timonere stated that he would do some research and would likely request to increase the square footage requirement to be larger than 8,000 sq/ft.

### **Tax Abatement - "But For" Clause**

Ward 3 Councilor RoLesia Holman discussed her concerns about the City's tax abatement process. She feels the City should not be offering 100% tax abatement for seven years to everyone that applies and there should be some variance as the City is still providing public services to those individuals. She stated that equality is not the same thing as equity. Different people and groups

have different needs. Even if people are given the exact same thing, it may not benefit all groups. She suggested adding a "But For" clause to the tax abatement application. The clause states "'But for' this abatement, the construction would not go forward." She also suggested offering a tiered approach with different percentages for different groups, such as for-profit, nonprofit, residential and commercial. Another option would be to reduce the percentage the City offers.

President John Roskovics stated he does not support any of the suggestions presented. He stated that he supports continued development in the City and supports the 100% tax abatement.

City Manager James Timonere stated he does not necessarily disagree with the "But For" clause, as it is always good to have additional information. However, the Ohio Revised Code indicates that individuals can apply for tax abatement after the construction is complete, so the "But For" clause would not make sense since the construction is already done. He also stated that the City of Ashtabula is already behind many other communities in the state because it offers less than the Ohio Revised Code allows.

Ward 4 Councilor Jodi Mills asked for clarification on what is included in the "But For" clause in the application. Ward 3 Councilor RoLesia Holman stated that the clause could be modified, how Council would choose. It basically just asks the applicant if they would go forward with the project if they did not receive the tax abatement.

Committee Chair Jane DiGiacomo asked for information on what surrounding areas offer for tax abatement.

Ward 3 Councilor RoLesia Holman asked if the City has ever exercised its right to revoke a tax abatement if the property owner does not do what was indicated in the application. City Manager James Timonere stated he believes the City has revoked tax abatement in the past.

## **New Business**

### **Public Communication (on Agenda Items Only)**

Steve Chase, of Arlington Avenue, stated that if individuals have the option to build a home in an area that offers a higher tax abatement, it will likely factor into their decision of where to build. He stated that the long-term goal is what matters. The City will be collecting property taxes on these properties 30 years from now. Mr. Chase also discussed some concerns regarding the food truck discussion. He pointed out that none of the parking spaces on Bridge Street are lined or marked, so it will be difficult to determine how many parking spots a food truck is occupying. He was also concerned that permits could only be revoked or denied if a background check shows a sex offense and would not be revoked or denied for other crimes. Mr. Chase discussed his concerns with the changes to the small box retail moratorium. He stated that the discussion is only taking place because of one business. The business owner applied for a permit after the moratorium was in place. He does not believe an exception should be made because the business owner did not contact the zoning department prior to signing a lease and purchasing equipment.

Frank Brown asked if he would need a permit to operate a hot dog cart. Assistant City Solicitor Catherine Colgan stated that the application and permitting process would apply to hot dog carts because the legislation has been titled "Mobile Food Vending." The legislation does allow for push carts to be operated on the sidewalk, with the permission of the property owner abutting the sidewalk.

Doug Blenman addressed the committee on behalf of the owners of Torro restaurant as to the small-box retail moratorium. The owner of Torro is the business owner that invested in the former Circle K

location on Route 20 and Woodman Avenue. He stated that the closure of Circle K has had a negative impact on the restaurant's business. Sales are down 40 percent. The only form of business they get is through Door Dash. Mr. Blenman stated that the location in question is under 2,500 sq/ft. The lease indicates it is 2,200 sq/ft. He stated that the convenient store services the community. The business owner plans to offer fresh food at the location. City Manager James Timonere stated that the moratorium was put in place to address the over-saturation of these types of stores in the City. The moratorium is a temporary pause until the master plan and zoning are completed. He stated that if the moratorium is repealed and replaced to include the previously discussed definition of small-box retail stores, which included square footage, it would not apply to the business in question. However, the business would still have to apply for a variance through the Planning Commission.

### **Next Meeting**

**September 3, 2025**

### **Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 8:44 p.m. by Committee Chair Jane DiGiacomo.