



City of Ashtabula

Ashtabula City Council

Community Development/Economic Development/Parks & Recreation Committee Meeting

Wednesday, September 3, 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, Member: Ward 3 Councilor RoLesia Holman, President John Roskovics

Absent: None

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

Parks & Recreation Board Members Present: None

Visitors: Anthony Oquendo, Frank Brown, Susan Smith, Mary Graves, Blake Hinkle, Ryan Lenc

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

City Manager James Timonere provided an update on the Appalachian Grant project in Downtown Ashtabula. Bids were received back for the sidewalks. There were two bidders and both came in a lot higher than expected. Staff is working with Eastgate and other local entities on other funding options to make up for the gap. City officials have requested an extension from the low bidder to allow more time to work on the funding. Received information back from Eastgate on the facade program. Hoping to have the subrecipient grant agreement for Council's consideration at the next meeting. The season is winding down in the parks now that school has resumed. The last day for lifeguards to guard Walnut Beach was Labor Day. Staff will begin to put the equipment away for the winter.

Committee Chair Jane DiGiacomo asked if the life rings at Walnut Beach lasted through the season. City Manager James Timonere stated that two of the four rings are left.

Ward 3 Councilor RoLesia Holman asked for a timeline on the downtown project as many individuals do not think the project will take place. City Manager James Timonere stated that his concern all along has been about how the state decided to disburse the funds for the project, which is what is

holding the project up. The state gives the money to Eastgate, then Eastgate gives the funds to the City and the City disburses the money to the businesses. City Manager James Timonere stated that the City of Geneva is experiencing the same issues with its project. He stated that once the City receives the finalized agreement from Eastgate, the project should move quickly. His hope was to have the sidewalk portion of the project completed by winter, and he is still hopeful of that. It will just depend on the additional funding. City Manager James Timonere stated the bids came in significantly higher than expected, at approximately \$1.3 to \$1.4 million, and there is about \$900,000 available for the project.

Ward 4 Councilor Jodi Mills asked if there was a deadline for the project to be completed. City Manager James Timonere stated the project has to be completed by the end of October 2026.

Parks & Recreation Committee Report

The Parks Board will be working on planning more programs and activities at the parks. The Memorial Day parade on May 25, 2026, will be the first event.

Parks & Rec Board August Meeting Minutes

Unfinished Business

Ward 3 Councilor RoLesia Holman continued her discussion on tax abatements. She stated that at the last meeting she proposed a "But For" Clause be added to the tax abatement application. She stated that she believes Council was under the assumption that the application came before the renovation. City Manager James Timonere stated that residential applications come after the project is complete; however, commercial applications are submitted prior to any construction starting and have to be approved or denied before any work can begin. Ward 3 Councilor RoLesia Holman stated that the "But For" Clause is a means for the applicant to share additional information so that Council can make a more informed decision. She stated that, often times, property tax abatements are given to individuals and businesses that don't really need them. She also suggested a tiered approach to the tax abatement process with different percentages for different groups, such as for-profit, nonprofit, residential and commercial. She also asked if the City asked for anything in return from commercial applicants, so it is mutually beneficial. City Manager James Timonere stated that in the commercial applications, the applicant must specify how much the investment is going to be, including building, machinery, equipment, etc., and they also must specify the number of new jobs to be created. The application is then reviewed every year, throughout the life of the abatement, to determine whether they are meeting those standards. If they are not meeting those standards, then the abatement can be pulled. Ward 3 Councilor RoLesia Holman stated another thing she would like to propose is a clawback provision. If someone does not honor their commitment, they will have to pay back the amount of the tax abatement.

Committee Chair Jane DiGiacomo asked what wards are seeing new construction. City Manager James Timonere stated Wards 1 and 2 and parts of Ward 3 have seen some new construction. He stated that when the City does in-fill zoning, Wards 3 and 5 could see some new construction and tax abatement will be important.

City Manager James Timonere stated that he was asked to start collecting data on what other areas are offering for tax abatements. He stated that Ashtabula County could go up to 100 percent for 15 years. The City currently offers 100 percent for seven years. A lot of municipalities are at the 15-year threshold. He stated one municipality offers different amounts depending on the type of construction, similar to the tiered approach suggested by Ward 3 Councilor RoLesia Holman. He stated that he is not opposed to the "But For" Clause, but is concerned with getting the message out, so people know they may not get the full abatement. He stated he feels the way the City has been doing the tax abatements has been very successful.

Ward 3 Councilor RoLesia Holman stated that she is not opposed to tax abatement, she just doesn't believe it should be all or nothing. She stated there are a lot of numbers between zero and 100.

Ward 4 Councilor Jodi Mills stated that with the rising cost of building materials, she is in favor of offering 100 percent for 15 years.

Blake Hinkle, of Union Avenue and W. 16th Street, stated that he believes that Ward 3 Councilor RoLesia Holman is just advocating for more information in terms of equity and transparency in terms of everyone getting a fair shake.

Ward 4 Councilor Jodi Mills asked what questions would be included in the "But For" Clause and what information they would ask applicants to disclose to fairly determine the percentage of tax abatement they would receive.

Susan Smith, of Ward 5, asked about the status of the former Sardi's building on Main Avenue. City Manager James Timonere stated he has had discussions with the current owners about their plans, but nothing has been confirmed. Ms. Smith asked if the owners received a tax abatement. City Manager James Timonere stated that they did not. Ms. Smith also asked for an update on the former Carlisle's building on Main Avenue. City Manager James Timonere stated that there is an issue with the grant funding and the project is now being re-imagined. It may or may not be apartments.

Anthony Oquendo asked about the house on West Avenue that caught fire. City Manager James Timonere stated that City officials are aware of the issue and the owner has been given orders to remediate the property. Mr. Oquendo asked if the City was still issuing citations for overgrown grass and other unsightly matters and if that also applied to the CSX Railroad underpass. City Manager James Timonere stated that the railroad had been notified about the grass. Mr. Oquendo stated that there are some large potholes in the area of Spencer Avenue, Todd Avenue, and Hiawatha Avenue as well as the entire area between W. 34th Street all the way to W. 41st Street.

Ward 3 Councilor RoLesia Holman asked about the next steps she should take regarding the tax abatement applications. City Manager James Timonere stated before exploring other options, he suggested asking the rest of Council if they are supportive of making changes. He stated he is willing to help with the work, but not if it's not going to go anywhere. Ward 3 Councilor RoLesia Holman stated she will research clawback provisions and bring some examples of "But For" Clauses to the next meeting.

New Business

Committee Chair Jane DiGiacomo stated that she has been looking for solutions to the homeless situation in the City. She stated that she has learned the following about homelessness:

- You can't help someone who doesn't want to be helped.
- We must enforce our laws. No one is above them.
- Too many groups are working in silos. We need coordination.
- Addiction and mental illness are a big part of the crisis.
- And yes, people are being brought to Ashtabula for treatment, then discharged into our streets.
- Outside agencies are also placing people here without any housing in place.

Committee Chair Jane DiGiacomo stated she believes the first step is to gather real data from rehab centers and agencies. She would like to know how many people the agencies are serving, how many are from out of town, and what support is offered to them when they are released. She stated

that pushing for partnerships is important so it does not become a "blame game" and it becomes about accountability and solutions.

Ward 3 Councilor RoLesia Holman stated that homelessness continues to be an issue. She believes that something can be done as long as there are honest conversations about what is possible so that there can be an action plan developed.

City Manager James Timonere stated that when collecting data, it is also important to know everything that the City staff does to assist those that are homeless or on the verge of becoming homeless. The staff works continuously to keep people housed. He stated that the homeless shelters in the City are full, and they are full of families, which is a different trend than what the City has seen. He stated that the real reason the homeless problem is prevalent is because of the people that don't want help. Mental health is the leading cause of homelessness in the area. Those that want to be helped are getting help. He stated that discussions have been taking place regarding the day center he has been proposing. He also stated that the other challenge the City is facing is that affordable housing is nonexistent. Even when there are situations where City staff can place people in homes, the available housing is extremely limited and those individuals that are on the verge of becoming homeless are facing rents of between \$900 and \$1,200 per month.

Committee Chair Jane DiGiacomo stated she keeps hearing that people are just dropped off in the City. City Manager James Timonere stated that 90 percent of Ashtabula Metropolitan Housing Authority's facilities are in the City. Most of the social service agencies that are available to assist individuals in need are also located in the City. He stated that if people are looking for assistance, it makes sense that they would come to the City.

Ward 3 Councilor RoLesia Holman asked if the social service organizations are maximizing the resources available to those that want the help. City Manager James Timonere stated that from his interactions with those organizations, he believes that they are; however, what is getting more difficult is placement due to the limited availability of affordable housing. Ward 3 Councilor RoLesia Holman noted that there is legislation in place regarding how people who are out on the street are dealt with. She asked what extent those individuals are being held accountable to what the law states. City Manager James Timonere stated that the police have been making arrests and issuing citations as necessary. Ward 3 Councilor RoLesia Holman asked if, after a person is adjudicated, if there is an issue with placement, are there other places within the county they can be released. Assistant City Solicitor Catherine Colgan stated that each individual situation is different. City Manager James Timonere stated that he has been discussing the possibility of using funds from the Opioid Settlements to hire a social worker to assist law enforcement in handling individuals who may be experiencing a mental health crisis and getting them connected to the services they need.

Committee Chair Jane DiGiacomo stated that during her research, she found information on a Housing Navigator, which is someone that would work with people when they are released from rehab. City Manager James Timonere stated that there was a Housing Navigator previously assigned to Ashtabula County. Unfortunately, the funding was pulled. The individual helped people navigate the system to get them assistance. Committee Chair Jane DiGiacomo stated that she read that there is funding available through HUD (Department of Housing and Urban Development) or the Opioid Settlements that can be used for such a position. City Manager James Timonere stated that he would be willing to look into HUD funding and feels it would be a good position to have; however, there is still the issue of available housing.

Ward 3 Councilor RoLesia Holman stated that there is a lot of discussion about what could happen, but asked what concrete steps could be taken to ensure it will. City Manager James Timonere stated

there are already a lot of interactions between area agencies on best practices to help the unhoused. He stated that he feels the day center is the first step in bringing all the agencies together. He said discussions have taken place with Catholic Charities, Signature Health, Square One, etc., about different ways to pull resources together to get things started. Funding is needed to move forward.

Ward 4 Councilor Jodi Mills asked if the court still assigns guardians or payees to individuals to help them manage their finances when they are not able. Assistant Solicitor Catherine Colgan stated that guardianship is very different from payeeship. Catholic Charities still offers a payee program to assist individuals with managing their finances.

Ward 3 Councilor RoLesia Holman stated there is no harm in requesting data and officials should be making data-driven decisions.

Committee Chair Jane DiGiacomo asked if a motion and vote was needed to send a letter to rehab centers to request data. City Manager James Timonere stated that it was not necessary to vote. If the committee wishes to send a letter, they can do so.

City Manager James Timonere stated that there is other data that officials need to look at in addition to Committee Chair Jane DiGiacomo's earlier suggestions. He stated that individuals released from rehab centers with nowhere to go are only one portion of the homeless population. The other portion includes those who are losing their homes or falling on hard times. Data should be collected from area social services agencies such as Catholic Charities, the Salvation Army, the Dream Center, City staff, and the Samaritan House, to name a few. He stated that looking at how many people received assistance through those agencies and their success rates is also important.

Committee Chair Jane DiGiacomo asked if the City could require agencies to provide a "warm hand-off" when individuals are released to ensure they are not being released to the streets. Assistant City Solicitor Catherine Colgan stated that hospitals and treatment facilities are all regulated by the state. She does not believe they would allow home rule authority to extend that sort of requirement. She also questioned how the City would be able to enforce it.

Ward 3 Councilor RoLesia Holman stated that she believes enforcement comes farther down the line. She stated that if there is an ask and an expectation that some data be provided, it raises a level of awareness that someone is looking at the data. If, after examining the data, a pattern can be determined, then it can be addressed.

Ward 4 Councilor Jodi Mills stated that when individuals are released from any kind of healthcare facility, they are given a plan, such as a hospital discharge plan, that outlines their care going forward. She stated that it is up to the individual person to make those choices. She agrees that the day center would be beneficial.

Ward 3 Councilor RoLesia Holman stated that gathering data is important to learn more about the situation.

Ward 4 Councilor Jodi Mills stated that she agrees, but it is also important to determine what data should be collected.

Committee Chair Jane DiGiacomo stated that she wants to know how many individuals are being treated each month, how many are from the Ashtabula community and how many are from outside the community. Upon discharge, how many went home, how many were released onto the streets,

and how many left against medical advice. She stated she would like to send out a request for the information and asked if there was anything that should be added to the list.

Ward 4 Councilor Jodi Mills stated she would like some time to think about it.

City Manager James Timonere stated that it might be beneficial to ask the agencies what sort of data they keep and what they would be willing to share.

Ward 3 Councilor RoLesia Holman also suggested reaching out to the City Health Department as they may have information to share.

City Manager James Timonere stated that the next step is figuring out what to do with the data to effect change. The root problem is those that do not want help.

Blake Hinkle, of Union Avenue and W. 16th Street, stated that he supports Committee Chair Jane DiGiacomo's efforts. He stated that data is the cornerstone of any action.

Susan Smith, Ward 5 resident, stated that there are several individuals that are in crisis. She believes data needs to be obtained for the number of sex offenders or drug traffickers and violent crimes. She asked if the police are asking individuals for identification and information when they encounter them in parks or on the streets. City Manager James Timonere stated that yes, that has happened and there have been situations where the individual is trying to get back to another area and officials assist them in doing so. Ms. Smith stated that she agrees with the idea of the day center, but asked what happens to them at night. City Manager James Timonere stated that the goal of the day center is to gain the trust of individuals so that they can go through the system and get the help they need.

Ryan Lencl, of Main Avenue, suggested that the City provide a license for the treatment facilities so that if they do not comply with providing the data officials are requesting, or their AMA rates get out of control, etc., then the license will be jeopardized. He stated that licensure is designed to ensure certain standards are being upheld. He suggested charging a fee for the license that can be put toward working to combat homelessness. He also suggested a portion of the revenue from treatment facilities be earmarked for a day center.

Ward 4 Councilor Jodi Mills asked if that was legal. Assistant City Solicitor Catherine Colgan stated that although she has not researched it, healthcare and treatment facilities are all governed by state statute, so she does not believe any kind of additional licensing would be allowed as a home-rule authority.

City Manager James Timonere stated that he has seen other municipalities base zoning fees on the type of business coming in. There may be a way to set a zoning fee for specific types of institutions.

President John Roskovics stated that Council previously invited administrators from Square One Health to speak at a Council meeting, and they were more than willing to provide information.

Committee Chair Jane DiGiacomo stated she believes the agencies will provide information and requesting it is a good start.

Community Partnerships & Homelessness Prevention

Discussion: Strengthening collaboration with local rehabilitation centers

Strategies to reduce the number of individuals leaving treatment and becoming homeless

Exploring wraparound services and accountability measures

Next Meeting

October 1, 2025

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 7:12 p.m. by Committee Chair Jane DiGiacomo.