



City of Ashtabula

Ashtabula City Council Work Session Agenda
Monday, November 17, 2025 at 5:30 PM
4230 Lake Avenue, Ashtabula, OH 44004

Minutes

Opening of Work Session

Call to Order

The Work Session was called to order at 5:30 p.m. by President John 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: Finance Director Vladimir Kan

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

Discussion with Ad Hoc Committee: Exploring Racism as a Public Health Crisis

President John Roskovics provided background information, stating that approximately five years ago, Council passed a resolution declaring racism as a health crisis, following Geneva City Council's example. After Ward 3 Councilor RoLesia Holman joined Council, she inquired about actions related to the resolution, which led to the formation of the Ad Hoc Committee: Exploring Racism as a Public Health Crisis. The committee has been operating for approximately three and a half years, with Ward 3 Councilor RoLesia Holman serving as Chair of the committee.

Ward 3 Councilor RoLesia Holman explained that the committee was formed to research and address health inequities in the City. Through detailed analysis of census data and health metrics, committee members uncovered significant health disparities across Ashtabula's wards, including a shocking 10-year difference in life expectancy between residents of different wards. She emphasized that these disparities represent not just numbers, but lost opportunities, time with families, and life experiences. Ward 3 Councilor RoLesia Holman stated that the committee found this to be unacceptable, and it compelled them to seek to understand the social determinants of health that cause these gaps and look for ways to bridge them. She stated that the committee has been committed for more than three years to doing this research and finding out this information, and now they want to move beyond simple awareness to recommend concrete policies that will ensure every resident has the opportunity to have a full and healthy life.

Ward 3 Councilor RoLesia Holman explained that the committee is seeking to transition from a temporary ad hoc committee to a more permanent entity. The committee is proposing the creation of the "Council for Thriving Communities." The group would serve as an advisory board to Council. Transitioning to a permanent board or commission would ensure eligibility for state and federal grants requiring community advisory data; create a structured space for residents' feedback; and, would shift focus from identifying problems to emphasizing strengths and identifying what City departments do well. Ward 3 Councilor RoLesia Holman stated that the creation of the advisory board would be at zero salary cost to the City and is designed to help govern more efficiently.

Ward 4 Councilor Jodi Mills questioned whether some committee recommendations overlapped with existing initiatives, noting efforts to expand the City's recycling program already underway. She also expressed concerns about potential conflicts with union agreements regarding transparency for salary increases.

President John Roskovics questioned how the proposed commission would differ from the current ad hoc committee, noting the ad hoc committee already provides regular reports to Council. Jeff Griffiths, committee member, stated that the creation of an advisory board or commission would formalize the committee.

Ward 2 Councilor Terence Guerriero asked for clarification on the proposed commission's role and whether the focus would be primarily on the City or would there be a broader focus. He also expressed concern about what authority it would have relative to existing committees. Mr. Griffiths stated that the proposed commission would provide additional resources and the ability to focus on areas that are not currently being looked at by other committees.

Vice President Russell Simeone stated that the proposed commission would essentially act like an advisory board to Council and make recommendations.

Ward 1 Councilor Kym Foglio stated that there are already existing committees for everything the proposed commission is suggesting it would focus on. She suggested the ad hoc committee members start attending the existing committee meetings. She also noted that Council members already have busy schedules and this would be another commitment.

Committee member Dr. Jessica Leveto stated that the creation of the proposed commission would allow its members to gather data and provide it to the already existing committees. The proposed commission would not be duplicating efforts or contradicting the work of the City, it would provide data that is not always available.

President John Roskovics reiterated his concerns about the need to form a permanent entity when the ad hoc committee already provides reports to Council and makes recommendations. He stated the committee members are still going to do their work and provide Council with research and information. He stated that he does not see the need to make it more complicated than it already is.

Ward 3 Councilor RoLesia Holman asked the City Solicitor to provide clarification about the purpose of an ad hoc committee. She stated that an ad hoc committee is not a committee that is sustained over time.

City Solicitor Cecilia Cooper stated that in the original legislation that set up the ad hoc committee, its goal was to establish desired outcomes that are fair and impartial to combat the public health crisis, create realistic criteria the City shall use to measure their success or failure in reaching the goals established by the ad hoc committee and report the same back to City Council in a format that

can be shared publicly. She stated that this is the committee's limited function. She stated that assuming the report the committee made to Council was the end of their study and the report back to Council, then the work of the ad hoc committee is completed. City Solicitor Cecilia Cooper clarified that an ad hoc committee isn't supposed to last forever. It has a specific function, and once it completes that function, it is done.

Ward 5 Councilor Jane DiGiacomo asked if Council was hesitating to move forward due to the proposed assignment of three members of Council to the commission.

Ward 3 Councilor RoLesia Holman clarified that the proposed legislation was a draft and acknowledged that certain changes needed to be made. She emphasized the importance of the ad hoc committee being able to continue their work and have an impact on the subgroups that are not being reached. She stated that the data indicates the outcomes are not the same and there are health disparities throughout the City. She stated that the existing committees have not addressed the issues because if they had, then there would not be a need for the work the ad hoc committee has been doing. She stated that continuing the work allows a more proactive response so that all residents have a better quality of life and not just some of them due to the way things have operated in the past. Ward 3 Councilor RoLesia Holman stated that the ad hoc committee is looking for revisions to the draft legislation to transition to a commission so that they can continue their work because there are issues in the city that need to be addressed.

City Manager James Timonere stated that while the data that has been presented is extensive and very detailed, it needs to be drilled down a bit. He also stated that there have been innuendos that the City doesn't have a diverse staff. He stated that he believes the City has a pretty diverse staff, especially in the years that he has been City Manager. He stated that he would be happy to provide that data. He noted several things in the draft legislation that may present issues, including overtime expenses for staff to attend meetings after hours and language stating "modest resources may be allocated to support the council." He questioned what would be considered "modest."

City Solicitor Cecilia Cooper identified issues in the draft legislation regarding membership appointments that would need clarification.

Ward 5 Councilor Jane DiGiacomo questioned whether the proposed commission would allow for membership from people outside the City. City Manager James Timonere stated that some of the advisory boards, such as the Planning Commission and Port Authority, have membership requirements that state members may live, own property or work within the City.

Vice President Russell Simeone recommended reducing the proposed commission membership from nine people to five to make meetings more manageable and effective, if the proposed commission moves forward.

Ward 3 Councilor RoLesia Holman stated that one of the things the committee has been able to garner through its support from Kent State University is drilling down a little deeper around what's happening in each ward. The information allows each councilor to be more aware of who their constituents are so they can serve them better. She stated that as a woman of color, specifically a black woman, she raises these issues because she does not feel they are being addressed. She expressed frustration that concerns affecting minority populations are being dismissed as statistically insignificant due to small numbers. She emphasized that all residents deserve equal attention and resources, stating that they aren't just numbers. They are lives in our city, and they all matter. She stated that it is difficult to feel the pushback because all residents deserve a higher quality of life, and it's Council's job to notice them and do everything they can to serve them well.

Ward 4 Councilor Jodi Mills asked if the committee discovered any major issues or red flags during their research. Ward 3 Councilor RoLesia Holman stated that there were a lot of red flags.

City Manager James Timonere questioned whether there was an actual policy that the City has that is causing this. He stated that there have been suggestions, but he has not seen any data indicating the disparities are the result of a City policy. He expressed support for the shift to a broader "thriving communities" focus, seeing it as more inclusive than solely focusing on racism. He stated that the focus would no longer be just about health, but about improving the economy, improving health, improving schools, and improving outcomes.

President John Roskovics suggested forming a new ad hoc committee focused on thriving communities with longer-term objectives.

Ward 3 Councilor RoLesia Holman asked why Council was reluctant to transition the ad hoc committee into a more permanent entity rather than another temporary committee.

Ward 5 Councilor Jane DiGiacomo stated she thinks it is a great idea and does not understand the reluctance. She volunteered to serve on the commission if needed.

Questions/Comments

Discussion

Public Comment (at Council's discretion)

Adjournment

The work session was adjourned at 6:34 p.m. by Council President Roskovics.

Ashtabula City Council will meet again on Monday, December 1, 2025 in Council Chambers. A Public Hearing will begin at 5:30 p.m. The Pre-Council meeting will begin at 6:00 p.m. followed by the Organizational Meeting at 6:30 p.m. and the Regular Council Meeting at 7:00 p.m.

DATE APPROVED:

December 1, 2025

ATTESTED BY:

John S. Roskovics

John S. Roskovics, President of Council

ATTESTED BY:

Stacy L. Millberg

Stacy L. Millberg, Clerk of Council