



City of Ashtabula
Ashtabula City Council
Safety Forces Committee
Thursday, March 12, 2026 at 8:30 AM
Council Chambers
4230 Lake Avenue, Ashtabula, OH 44004

Minutes

Opening of Committee Meeting

Call to Order

The Ashtabula City Council Safety Forces Committee meeting was called to order at 8:30 a.m. by Committee Chair Terence Guerriero.

Roll Call

Members Present: Chair: Ward 2 Councilor Terence Guerriero, Vice Chair: Ward 1 Councilor Kym Foglio,

Absent: Member: Council President John Roskovics

Officers Present: City Manager James Timonere, Clerk of Council Stacy Millberg, Ward 4 Councilor Jodi Mills

Ashtabula Department Heads Present: Police Chief Rob Stell, Fire Chief Shawn Gruber, Lt. Geoff Cannon

Visitors: Attorney John Schneider, Dan Morell & Associates

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

APD - Homeless Outreach Efforts

Chief Rob Stell presented an overview of the department's homeless outreach program that began approximately three years ago. He explained that the City started experiencing increased homelessness issues about 10 years ago, with the problem becoming particularly serious five to seven years ago. The program initially started with two officers from the police department taking a boots-on-the-ground approach rather than just holding meetings. Former Fire Inspector Steve Chase was also involved early on. The team has since grown to approximately 10 people from various organizations, including Ashtabula Fire Department, including the new fire inspector, two APD officers, representatives from the Department of Job and Family Services, Ashtabula Regional Medical Center, Square One Health, Signature Health, and Catholic Charities.

Chief Rob Stell noted significant improvements in the homeless situation, which is unusual for cities dealing with this issue. A key development was working with Square One Health, which changed its business model. Previously, 80 to 90 percent of homeless individuals were from out of town, but now the department is seeing far fewer transients and more familiar local faces. Square One now either moves individuals to other facilities or sends them back to their home communities.

Chief Rob Stell stated that the fire department's code enforcement efforts have been crucial in shutting down encampments, and cleanup efforts have also contributed to the improvement. He reported that where there used to be a "whole village" of encampments in the gulf area three to four years ago, there was only one encampment with one person during the last visit, and it wasn't even in the City limits.

Committee Chair Terence Guerriero asked about the current number of homeless people. Chief Rob Stell stated that it is hard to give an exact number, especially during the winter months, but he estimated less than 50. City Manager James Timonere stated that during a recent point-in-time count conducted by Catholic Charities and other groups, they found between 40 and 80 individuals countywide dealing with homelessness issues. He also mentioned that Sub Zero Mission from Painesville recently posted on Facebook that they only found 11 people during their outreach in Ashtabula.

Chief Rob Stell stated that the outreach team will continue their efforts to keep the issue from getting worse again. He stated that some of the team members will give a more detailed presentation at the upcoming Regular Council meeting on Monday.

Police Department – Chief’s Report

Chief Rob Stell reported the calls for service are slightly higher for this time of year, but nothing too dramatic. He stated the busiest time for calls is typically between noon and 9 p.m., though calls come in around the clock. He noted that some of the calls reflected in the stats are officer-generated activities in addition to calls for service.

Chief Rob Stell also provided an update on targeted traffic enforcement efforts, reporting that officers have conducted enforcement on West Avenue, Main Avenue and Bridge Street so far. The next planned enforcement will return to Bridge Street. During these operations, officers have made several arrests in addition to issuing traffic citations.

APD February Stats

Fire Department – Chief’s Report

Chief Shawn Gruber reported that February statistics were consistent with the previous two years with nothing noteworthy or out of line. It was noted that this was Chief Shawn Gruber's last meeting in his official capacity as fire chief, as he is retiring on March 18th, with Lt. Geoff Cannon taking over at 0000 on March 19th.

AFD February Stats

City Manager’s Report

City Manager James Timonere discussed the City's rescue boat situation, explaining that the 15-year-old vessel needs to be repowered due to serious engine issues and obsolete electronics. The boat has two outboard motors with electronic controllers that are no longer functioning properly. He provided some background on the boat's funding through Operation Stone Garden, a border patrol initiative that provides grant funding through the county. The City uses the boat for border patrol activities on the water to ensure security from Canada, with funding covering staffing, fuel, and maintenance. However, there is currently a disagreement with the Ashtabula County Sheriff's Office about the funding.

City Manager James Timonere stated that the boat is not solely a fire boat but serves as a mission-critical vessel. After the Coast Guard abandoned Station Ashtabula, the City contacted Border Patrol and Homeland Security for permission to use the boat for emergency rescues, which was granted. However, any rescue operations or expenses outside of border patrol missions cannot be reimbursed through the grant, so the City alternates fuel costs between grant funding and City funds.

City Manager James Timonere reported good staffing levels in both departments and noted upcoming testing and promotional processes. He thanked Chief Shawn Gruber for his years of leadership and service to the department.

City Solicitor's Report

Unfinished Business

Alley House Numbers

The committee reviewed legislation requiring house numbers on buildings facing alleys. The discussion focused on implementation details, including the effective date, which was set for September 1, to provide six months notice. The notification process and size requirements of the signs were also discussed.

City Manager James Timonere requested that the enforcement authority be changed from "City engineer" to "Planning and Community Development Department" since the City engineer is contracted. The committee determined that notification letters should be sent to both property owners and residents and the letters should be sent by Planning and Community Development. The legislation requires numbers to be a minimum of 4 inches as

specified in City Code Section 1329.04. Enforcement procedures were discussed with the expectation that warnings would be issued before citations and that the goal is compliance rather than court action.

Motion: Vice Chair Kym Foglio moved to bring the legislation out of committee; Committee Chair Terence Guerriero seconded.

VOICE VOTE

Yeas: Committee Chair Terence Guerriero, Vice Chair Kym Foglio

Nays: None

Motion carried.

Speed Signs on Bridge Street

The committee discussed ongoing speed enforcement efforts on Bridge Street following complaints from residents. Chief Rob Stell reported that officers conducted targeted enforcement and made several arrests in addition to traffic stops.

City Manager James Timonere confirmed plans to install flashing speed signs, with quotes received totaling approximately \$8,000. He indicated that one sign will likely be permanently mounted on Bridge Street and run on solar power, while another will be movable for other areas.

Committee members acknowledged the speed problem. Committee Chair Terence Guerriero reported observing multiple vehicles traveling at excessive speeds during a 45-minute period.

New Business

The committee briefly discussed a complaint about a basketball court on Joseph Avenue where children were playing in the street. Chief Rob Stell indicated the department regularly addresses similar issues throughout the summer and has had to remove basketball hoops from streets when necessary.

Attorney John Schneider, of Dan Morell and Associates, spoke on behalf of a property owner on Burroughs Place regarding parking issues. The narrow street creates problems when vehicles park across from driveways, making it difficult for residents to access their properties. Mr. Schneider presented videos demonstrating the issues and requested no parking zones across from the two driveways at 218 and 220 Burroughs Place.

Chief Rob Stell noted that this was the first complaint received about this location in his 20 years as chief and 31 years with the department. He agreed to conduct a traffic study and provide recommendations to the City Manager by the end of the following week.

Ward 4 Councilor Jodi Mills asked about golf cart inspections. Chief Rob Stell stated that the department is ready for the upcoming season with inspections and tags.

It was also noted that traffic enforcement efforts on Main Avenue would resume for the summer months when the school resource officer at Kent State University Ashtabula becomes available after classes end in early June.

Next Meeting

April 9, 2026

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 9:29 a.m. by Committee Chair Terence Guerriero.