



## **City of Ashtabula**

Ashtabula City Council

Public Works / Public Utilities / Cable / Schools Committee Meeting

Tuesday, March 24, 2026 at 8:30 AM

Council Chambers

4230 Lake Avenue, Ashtabula, OH 44004

### **Minutes**

#### **Opening of Committee Meeting**

##### **Call to Order**

The meeting of the Ashtabula City Council Public Works / Public Utilities / Cable / Schools Committee was called to order at 8:30 a.m. by Committee Chair Jodi Mills.

##### **Roll Call**

**Members Present:** Chair: Jodi Mills, Member: Council President John Roskovics

**Absent:** Vice Chair: Ward 2 Councilor Terence Guerriero

**Officers Present:** City Manager James Timonere, Finance Director Vladimir Kan, Clerk of Council Stacy Millberg

**Department Heads Present:** Public Services Superintendent John Melnik, Water Pollution Control Superintendent Mark Verzella

##### **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 reported on the transition from winter operations. Parks operations were scheduled to begin the following week on March 30, with two staff members being shifted to park duties. The City was actively advertising for summer help to assist with parks, water pollution control, public works, and sanitation departments.

Two employees had been assigned to operate the sewer jet and were currently undergoing training, with full operations expected to begin soon. The street sweeper remained a significant concern, having been sent to a different company for evaluation. The inspection revealed serious engine problems, including a cracked piston and cylinders that were out of alignment. The secondary engine that operates the vacuum and brooms could not be repaired. A replacement Cummins engine was estimated at approximately \$25,000 installed. City Manager James Timonere indicated he would present an ordinance at the April 6 meeting for engine replacement. Delivery is expected to take two to six weeks due with installation following.

Committee Chair Jodi Mills expressed concern about the extended timeline, potentially extending to June, and inquired about borrowing equipment or leasing options. City Manager James Timonere noted that leasing was extremely expensive, and they might consider bringing in a crew to perform street sweeping services depending on the cost.

Discussion turned to fuel costs, with committee members noting significant price increases observed during recent travel. City Manager James Timonere explained that the City maintains underground diesel and gas tanks that provide some buffer from immediate price fluctuations, though future purchases would reflect higher costs. The police and fire departments use WEX cards for fuel purchases, which provide modest discounts, but unlike

chemicals, fuel pricing cannot be locked in for annual contracts.

Committee Chair Jodi Mills requested updates on several ongoing projects, including the recycling grant application, and radar installation at the W. 19th Street, Lake Avenue, and West Avenue intersection. City Manager James Timonere stated that the recycling grant application remained pending until April. Radar installation bids had been received at \$41,000, with the item scheduled for the next council meeting. He indicated the radar system would improve traffic flow beyond the current loop detector system, which was experiencing reliability issues.

Salt supplies were adequate for the remainder of the season, with the annual state bid process beginning in April or May. The transfer station roof engineering work continued in preparation for bidding.

### **Water Pollution Control Report**

Water Pollution Control Superintendent Mark Verzella provided the report. The facility had replaced the influent pH controller, which is now operational. Plant effluent conductivity testing was ongoing for the Outfall Relocation Project, with a study planned for April in the boat slip area. Background sampling was being conducted at both the wastewater plant and boat slip locations.

Preparation for disinfection season was underway, with crews cleaning weirs and UV tanks. The UV system will be tested in the coming weeks to identify any electrical issues, with E. Coli testing scheduled to begin in mid-April.

The recirculation pump for the digester has been ordered. Digester No. 1 had a pump partially installed from shelf stock, with electrical connections and balancing work remaining. A pot feeder system was being installed to safely add chemicals to the boiler water system as a safety provision recommended by their service company.

The generator experienced issues with its day tank fuel transfer system, which was repaired in-house along with replacement of the radar level indicator controller. Cummins was called to verify proper operation and assist with system priming. The new dump truck has been delivered and is in service.

A significant cost-saving measure was implemented in industrial pretreatment services. The previous contract with Verdantis cost nearly \$20,000 annually for biennial services. Staff expressed confidence in taking on additional responsibilities in-house and planned to issue a new RFP for time-and-materials based technical assistance only when needed, hoping to reduce annual costs to \$4,000 to \$5,000. This could save the City \$15,000 to \$20,000 annually while maintaining program integrity.

Safety training is scheduled for April 23, with confined space training for approximately 20 to 22 individuals from public works and water pollution control departments. The training would use the City's own equipment, including self-retracting lifelines and four-gas meters.

Staffing is currently full, though one employee needs to obtain certification by October. Water Pollution Control Superintendent Mark Verzella had discussed a seasonal employee with City Manager James Timonere but acknowledged competition for seasonal workers across multiple departments.

The outfall project would require complex work in April, including entering the new outfall structure and diverting 100 percent of plant flow. Recent heavy rains had pushed the plant to peak flows exceeding 22 million gallons.

### **WPC Report**

#### **Public Works Report**

Public Services Superintendent John Melnik provided the report. Public Works was transitioning from winter operations despite the extended winter season. Equipment cleaning and maintenance was proceeding, with crews preparing for pothole patching operations. The asphalt plant does not open until the week of April 20, complicating permanent repairs to utility cuts, many of which were attributed to gas and water company work rather than City projects.

All mowing equipment had been serviced and was ready for spring operations when grass growth warranted. Parks operations will begin March 30 with three dedicated staff members preparing facilities for summer use.

Johnson Tree Company was conducting tree removal operations, with completion expected by April 2 weather permitting. Additional trees were being evaluated for future removal quotes. City crews continued catch basin and manhole repairs, discovering winter-related damage to aging infrastructure.

The leaf bag collection schedule was posted on the City website, with operations beginning the second week of April based on previous years' schedules.

Committee Chair Jodi Mills asked if the number of tree removal requests had increased. Public Services Superintendent John Melnik stated that residents will see crews out cutting trees down and then call and request to have other trees removed. He stated that high winds will cause tree limbs to come down, but that doesn't mean the tree is dead. The City tries to wait until spring and summer to evaluate trees because a good indication is leaf growth. If there are leaves on the tree, it is alive and thriving. Tree removal costs are substantial, with the first round costing \$17,000.

Committee Chair Jodi Mills asked for an update on the 2026 paving project. City Manager James Timonere stated that bid openings were occurring that day and work is required to be completed by August.

### **New Business**

Construction runoff concerns were addressed regarding issues in areas of the Harbor. City Manager James Timonere clarified that complaints about damaged storm basins were unfounded, with inspections confirming the infrastructure was not damaged. While silt fencing had been compromised during severe weather, violation notices were issued and corrections were made. The City's MS4 permit compliance was handled through GPD, which reviewed all construction projects under an acre both before, during, and after construction. City Manager James Timonere noted this situation was unique due to the hillside location but emphasized that proper mitigation measures were in place.

The Bridge Street pump station was discussed after a recent Facebook post urging residents to be mindful of what they are flushing. Staff acknowledged the ongoing challenge of debris removal from pump stations, including nonflushable items that are marketed as flushable. The discussion highlighted the need for public education about proper waste disposal to prevent system problems and costly maintenance issues.

### **Next Meeting**

The next meeting is April 28, 2026.

### **Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 9:18 a.m. by Committee Chair Jodi Mills.