



## City of Ashtabula

Ashtabula City Council

Community Development/Economic Development/Parks & Recreation Committee Meeting

Wednesday, May 6, 2026 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

**Absent:** none

**Officers Present:** City Manager James Timonere, Clerk of Council Stacy Millberg

**Parks & Recreation Board Members Present:**

**Visitors:** Pete Bean, LaVette Hennigan

##### 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

##### America 250 Ashtabula County

Tina Fuller and Emily Fuller presented the committee with an overview of the America 250 Ashtabula County celebration, a countywide initiative commemorating the nation's 250th anniversary (semi-quincentennial). The planning effort has been underway for approximately two years, organized as a nonprofit with the Ashtabula County Covered Bridge Festival serving as fiscal agent, making donations tax-exempt. Ms. Fuller explained several plans for the event, which will take place on July 4 at Giddings Park in Jefferson.

- **Bell Ringing Service:** At 11:45 a.m. on July 4, churches across Ashtabula County are being asked to ring their bells 13 times — once per minute for 13 minutes — representing the 13 original colonies. Outreach has been made to nearly every church in the county, and participating churches will be listed publicly.
- **The Grand Parade of History:** The parade will stop off at noon from Jefferson High School, proceeding up Poplar Street, then down Jefferson Street to Giddings Park at the corner of Market and Jefferson Street. The parade is organized chronologically through history, beginning with the Sons and Daughters of the American Revolution and the Lenape Nation, and progressing through time. The goal is 250 parade entries. Notable entries include a 1912 Model A Ford — the first vehicle used at the first Ford dealership in Ashtabula County, believed to have been touched by Henry Ford himself. Homes and businesses along the route are encouraged to decorate, with crowd favorite awards for floats and properties. The planning committee is also in the process of securing a military flyover for the event.

- Festival Grounds at Giddings Park: Following the parade, the festival will occupy several areas around Giddings Park for the remainder of the day:
  - Liberty Picnic Grounds will feature a main stage at the Covered Bridge Pavilion with continuous live music, including a newly organized all-county band. An opening ceremony is planned for 1:30 p.m. A beer garden will be present, featuring a special craft brew produced by a local Bridge Street establishment.
  - The Walk of Time is an experiential exhibit conceived by Emily Fuller, modeled after the concept of the World's Fair. Visitors will walk through portals representing 50-year increments of American history beginning in 1776, with displays, re-enactors, and living history presentations at each station. The Ashtabula Historical Society will have the Giddings Law Office — the office of noted abolitionist statesman Joshua Giddings — open for tours. The Jefferson Depot will also be open for its Early America Live program. Wagon rides will connect the Walk of Time to the Jefferson Mill, one of Jefferson's oldest businesses, which the Beckwith family is opening for public tours. Historic Fact yard signs are also planned for each time-period section.
  - The Artisan Market will feature home-based artisan vendors and crafters.
  - The Family Americana Arcade will be located across from the fire department on Jefferson Street, featuring a second stage with live music, pie-eating and watermelon-eating contests, a speech contest on America 250 themes with winners reading their entries, free carnival-style games for children, bounce houses, and a demonstration by the Ashtabula County Amateur Radio Operators.
- Fireworks: The festival will conclude with a fireworks display launched from Emorial Fiel beginning at approximately 9:45 p.m., and lasting roughly 20 minutes.

Parking will be available at the Ashtabula County Fairgrounds with free transportation provided by Sunset Transportation to and from the festival sight. Vendors and parade applications are available through the America 250 website at [ashtabula250.org](http://ashtabula250.org), the Facebook page Ashtabula County America 250, or by email at [AshtabulaCounty250@gmail.com](mailto:AshtabulaCounty250@gmail.com). Commemorative T-shirts, pins, and window clings are available through the online store on the website, with pickup available at the Refindary in Jefferson or the Ashtabula County Library.

Ward 3 Councilor RoLesia Holman raised the importance of inclusive representation throughout the event, particularly for communities whose experience of America's founding was not uniformly celebratory. She inquired specifically about the role of the Lenape Nation, opportunities to represent Hispanic and Asian communities, and whether the history of the abolitionist movement and the Underground Railroad would be highlighted within the Walk of Time. Ms. Fuller acknowledged these as areas the organizers have been actively working to address, noting that the Walk of Time is intended as a learning opportunity and that spaces on the exhibit remain open. Emily Fuller noted that historic fact signage at each time-period portal would help convey a broader national narrative. Ward 3 Councilor RoLesia Holman also suggested that the Underground Railroad stops within the Village of Jefferson could be incorporated into a walking map or display within the Walk of Time. Ms. Fuller welcomed the idea, noting that such a walking tour of the small village would be feasible for festival attendees.

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

City Manager James Timonere reported that parks crews have been working diligently despite recent heavy rainfall, prioritizing maintenance of baseball fields currently in use. Preparation work has begun at Walnut Beach in anticipation of summer season. Regarding lifeguards, City Manager James Timmonere noted that outreach has been made to the YMCA but a response had not yet been received. The concession stand at Walnut Beach was noted as typically opening around Memorial Day, weather permitting, with the current contract running from Memorial Day through Labor Day. City Manager James Timonere confirmed that operators are welcome to open earlier or remain open later than the contract term.

Bands on the Beach was confirmed as fully scheduled, with flyers designed and Facebook events forthcoming. The event will again be held on Thursday evenings from 7 to 9 p.m. Three sponsors have been secured for the current season: the VFW, Ashtabula Regional Medical Center, and Erie Bank, with all costs covered by those sponsorships.

Ward 3 Councilor RoLesia Holman requested that future discussion of the tax abatement process be conducted in a more conversational, workshop-style format rather than a purely informational report-out. City Manager James Timonere noted that his office is actively reviewing the process and had reached out to the County Auditor to explore parameters for a more meaningful and targeted abatement program, specifically examining what types of remodeling or improvement work meaningfully affects property value. Ward 3 Councilor RoLesia Holman expressed appreciation for the willingness to examine and improve the process.

## **Parks & Recreation Committee Report**

Committee Chair Jane DiGiacmon provided an update on the Memorial Day Parade, noting that the Parks and Recreation Board has been the organizing committee for the event. The parade is scheduled for May 25 at 11 a.m. and will open with a flyover by a P-51 Mustang. Approximately 19 units have been registered to date, and registration remains open through May 15. Interested parties were encouraged to contact Committee Chair Jane DiGiacomo to obtain the participation form.

## **Unfinished Business**

Ward 4 Councilor Jodi Mills reminded those in attendance of the upcoming City Cleanup, scheduled for May 9 at 8:30 a.m. Bags, gloves, and grabbers will be provided. Participants who have not yet signed up were encouraged to contact the Clerk of Council at [clerkofcouncil@cityofashtabula.com](mailto:clerkofcouncil@cityofashtabula.com) to be assigned to one of the 34 identified cleanup routes. Lunch will follow at the Ashtabula District Library courtesy of Signature Health.

## **New Business**

Pete Bean, of My Neighborhood Collaborative, announced that the organization is disbanding and wished to direct a portion of its remaining funds to the Parks and Recreation Board. Mr. Bean presented a \$5,000 donation, expressing the organization's desire that the funds be used to purchase a swing set at Clifford Kadon Presidential Park, with any remaining balance leveraged alongside park levy funds to resurface the basketball and/or tennis courts at the park to make them usable for residents. Mr. Bean reflected on the organization's contributions over the years, including the construction of a pavilion and a playground at the park, and expressed hope that the donation would help restore the park to its former prominence. City Manager James Timonere thanked Mr. Bean and acknowledged the organization's legacy. He noted that the Parks Board has already been discussing a broader redesign of Kadon Park, including bringing the courts toward, a possible new playground set to replace the aging equipment, and naturalization of portions of the large park with pollinator gardens and a walking trail. City Manager James Timonere indicated the donation would help with those plans.

## **Next Meeting**

**June 3, 2026**

## **Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 6:20 p.m. by Committee Chair Jane DiGiacomo.