



City of Ashtabula

Ashtabula City Council

Community Development/Economic Development/Parks & Recreation Committee Meeting

Wednesday, July 1, 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, Member: Ward 3 Councilor RoLesia Holman

Absent: Vice Chair: Ward 4 Councilor Jodi Mills

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

Parks & Recreation Board Members Present: Anthony Oquendo

Visitors:

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 updates on several active initiatives.

Code Enforcement: For the month of June, staff issued 185 code enforcement letters and/or door hangers and scheduled 40 rental unit inspections. Year-to-date totals stand at 485 letters/door hangers issued and 171 rental unit inspections scheduled. The Harbor Ridge property continues to occupy significant staff time, with additional enforcement actions anticipated by the end of the week.

Master Plan: The master plan is ready to advance to the Planning Commission, which has scheduled it for discussion at its August meeting. The citizen advisory committee that assisted with the plan has concluded its work, and all public meetings have been held. Following Planning Commission review and approval, a recommendation will be forwarded to City Council for adoption. The related zoning update is also progressing well, with a consultant update call having taken place on the day of the meeting.

Appalachian Community Grant Program – Streetscape: Construction has moved to the east side of the road and is proceeding rapidly. For the façade program, 22 participants are enrolled, representing full utilization of allocated funds. Of those, 16 projects have been bid out and bids received; 3 contracts have been awarded and work has started; 13 contracts are scheduled to be signed the week of July 7th; 3 projects required rebidding due to cost and design issues; and 3 project bids are due by July 15th.

Collins Boulevard: Construction has also commenced, with a brief early access issue for two abutting businesses

having been corrected promptly upon notification.

Brownfield Grant – Tannery Hill: The Governor announced that the Ashtabula City Port Authority was awarded \$743,184 in Brownfield funds for cleanup and remediation at the Tannery Hill property. The project will consist of soil excavation, engineering controls, and implementation of a risk management plan. City Manager James Timonere noted that a developer has expressed interest in a high-end destination lodge on the site, and emphasized that the Port Authority conducted all grant work, owns the property, and intends to retain ownership after project completion. Public access to any trails will be maintained.

CDBG Flexible Grant – Renick: A Community Development Block Grant of \$295,000 was received for second-floor improvements at Renick, with a completion deadline of July 2028.

Critical Infrastructure Grant – Hulbert Hill: Due to the volume of concurrent projects, this work has been deferred to next spring. Bid documents will be prepared by year-end, with bidding to occur during the winter months to target favorable pricing.

Accessory Structure Moratorium: City Manager James Timonere informed the committee that the current moratorium on accessory structures over 200 square feet has created increasing friction with residents. A situation arose in which the county building department issued a building permit without a required zoning permit, resulting in garage construction commencing, which in turn renewed complaints from others previously denied. Given that the master plan and zoning update are nearing completion, he stated his intention to recommend to City Council on Monday that the moratorium ordinance be repealed, and the matter governed by existing zoning, with a more comprehensive approach to be addressed in the new zoning code.

Special Guest Presentation

Emergency Preparedness — Yvonka Hall, Northeast Ohio Community Resilience Centre

Yvonka Hall, Executive Director of the Northeast Ohio Community Resilience Center (NEOCRC), delivered a presentation titled *Building Resilience in Extreme Weather in Northeast Ohio*. The NEOCRC is the lead organization on a project funded by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), with The Ohio State University serving as the technical assistance partner. The grant period runs from October 2024 through September 2027.

Ms. Hall described the NEOCRC as the first coalition in the state of Ohio focused on the social, structural, environmental, and behavioral determinants of health, specifically examining how environmental conditions impact community health outcomes. The project covers nine counties: Ashtabula, Cuyahoga, Geauga, Lorain, Mahoning, Medina, Summit, and Trumbull.

The NEOCRC conducted community meetings during which approximately 168 participants across all nine counties engaged with the project. Roughly 10 percent of participants represented Ashtabula. Surveys, assessments, and facilitated conversations were used to gather community-identified priorities. Geospatial mapping conducted by Ohio State University's civil engineering department was used to cross-reference community input against scientific data.

She discussed key findings for Ashtabula County. The county's total population is approximately 100,000. The poverty rate ranges from 15.2 to 17.6 percent, approximately 3 percent above both the state and national averages. The average flood risk score for the county is 63 out of 100, compared to a Northeast Ohio average of 38 and a state average of 45. The average winter weather risk score is 88 out of 100. Socially vulnerable populations of particular concern include low-income households, children under age 5, and persons with disabilities.

Flooding emerged as the community's top concern, described as happening sometimes but getting progressively worse and being somewhat to extremely harmful. Community members identified the following locations as flood-impacted: Geneva/Cowles Creek, Harpersfield Township, Austinburg Township (Grand River), Rock Creek, Main Avenue, Ashtabula Town Square, and Bridge Street. Extreme heat was identified as a secondary priority. Jefferson was noted as the highest-risk community across combined metrics of heat risk, social vulnerability, impervious surfaces, and lack of tree canopy.

Participants proposed a range of solutions including rain gardens, mold remediation, improved storm drainage, home repairs, educational resources around flooding, disaster preparedness plans, improved infrastructure, funding for cleanup, stronger coalitions, road condition notifications, community safe spaces, cooling stations, shelter for elderly and unhoused individuals, solar infrastructure, green rooftop infrastructure, and expanded tree coverage.

Ms. Hall described the NEOCRC's vision for a Northeast Ohio Community Resilience Hub Ecosystem, which aims to connect community-based organizations, government agencies, universities, and non-governmental organizations. She stressed that emergency preparedness plans must actively involve the community, not only government systems, and that gaps are frequently discovered only when plans are tested against community realities. She cited the example of Akron, which responded to the NEOCRC's engagement by committing to establish its own resilience hub. Ms. Hall also raised concern about a Nature Conservancy proposal for a resilience hub located 20 miles from the community, noting that transportation access during emergencies is a critical and often overlooked gap, referencing the failures of bus-based evacuation during Hurricane Katrina.

Ms. Hall's emphasis on tree canopy prompted substantial discussion. A community member noted that a prior city sustainability study had identified tree canopy as a top solution. LaVette Hennigan asked if the City had any requirements for residents to get permission to plant trees on their property. City Manager James Timonere stated that residents do not need permission to plant trees on their property. If they wish to plant trees in the tree lawn, he requests that the City be notified since it becomes the City's responsibility. County Commissioner JP Ducro asked if tree planting requirements would be incorporated into the new zoning. City Manager James Timonere confirmed that tree species guidance is under discussion as part of the zoning update, with a focus on native species appropriate for proximity to roads and power lines. Ms. Hall clarified that homeowners can achieve meaningful canopy coverage from shallower-rooted tree species without concern for underground infrastructure impacts.

Rick Coblitz questioned the statistics being presented as only 16 people out of a population of 100,000 in Ashtabula County were surveyed. He felt that the heat and cold were a much higher risk in this area than flooding. City Manager James Timonere stated that the flooding concerns expressed in the surveys may reflect basement sewer backups more than surface flooding.

Ward 3 Councilor RoLesia Holman expressed appreciation for the scope of the presentation and for the presence of county representatives and emergency management officials. She acknowledged the intergenerational composition of the meeting and expressed hope for greater alignment across ward-level planning and the resilience framework. She asked if there were a template municipalities could use when creating disaster preparedness plans so the areas that are most vulnerable are included. Ms. Hall explained that the NEOCRC Hub is working on creating emergency plans for all the counties involved. Each county has been invited to be part of that hub, so gaps can be identified. Ward 3 Councilor RoLesia Holman also asked whether NEOCRC provides disaster preparedness resources at the individual and family level. Ms. Hall stated that the organization has information available and she will forward it. EMA Director Mike Fitchet stated that the [Ready.gov](https://www.ready.gov) website has emergency preparedness information available. He also explained that EMA uses an emergency notification system to inform residents of emergency situations.

Linda Coblitz from the Ashtabula County Master Gardeners noted that 250 native Buckeye trees have been sold and are being planted across the area, including at the Ashtabula school site. Also representing Zonta International's Ashtabula Club, she reported that the organization has assembled and distributed emergency go-bags to households in the area.

Ms. Hall invited committee members and residents to complete the community input survey sheets and return them before the close of the meeting so that the data could be incorporated into ongoing geospatial analysis. She offered to return for future community meetings if requested.

Parks & Recreation Committee Report

Anthony Oquendo presented the report. The board reported the successful return of the Memorial Day Parade and ceremony despite construction and logistical challenges. The event was well attended and positively received. The board documented planning lessons, including improved participant forms, traffic control portocpls, and earlier public communication timelines, to build a stronger baseline for future years. The ceremony also marked the beginning of the Ashtabula Veterans Row of Honor.

The board discussed ongoing safety and conduct concerns at Lance Cpl. Kevin Cornelius Memorial Park, including

damage to the gazebo, litter, reported inappropriate behavior, and a recent assault near the gazebo. A recent Ashtabula Police Department arrest at South Park for apparent drug activity was also noted. The board requested a review of applicable park ordinances and signage to ensure rules are clear, reasonable, and enforceable.

The board acknowledged a recent drowning at Walnut Beach and stated it is actively researching protective warning systems, public notification tools, and emergency response improvements to enhance public safety at the beach.

A volunteer-driven initiative to build a skate park at Walnut Beach is underway. Ramps from a Red Bull-related project have been made available for use and volunteers have assisted with site clean-up. Home Depot indicated willingness to donate materials and stain for the pavilion, pending proper City review and approval. The board expressed support for the project while emphasizing the need to follow City procedures and coordinate with the City Manager.

The board discussed additional improvement opportunities at Walnut Beach, including bocce courts, horseshoe areas, and concerns about restroom and concession building conditions.

With the historic Union Pacific Big Boy 4014 expected to travel through Ashtabula again on July 13, the board discussed obtaining a parks and recreation tent, table cover, and informational brochures to promote City parks, volunteer opportunities, and future programming to residents and visitors attending the event.

The board reviewed several park-specific issues, including vandalism at Nappi Field, safety hazards at E. 48th Street Park, and a beehive that was removed from Clifford Kadon Presidential Park. South Park was noted as showing improvement, though continued attention is warranted.

Upcoming programming includes Bands on the Beach, potential concerts in the park, and a movie night at W. 38th Street Park on July 17th. Commissioner JP Ducro announced a volunteer cleanup event at South Park on Friday, July 10, beginning at 9 a.m. Participants are encouraged to bring personal gardening tools, gloves, and protective eyewear. City Manager agreed to coordinate equipment, materials, and City staff support.

Unfinished Business

New Business

Next Meeting

August 5, 2026

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 7:04 p.m. by Committee Chair Jane DiGiacomo.