



City of Ashtabula

Ashtabula City Council

Public Works / Public Utilities / Cable / Schools Committee Meeting

Tuesday, June 23, 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, Vice Chair: Ward 2 Councilor Terence Guerriero, Member: Council President John Roskovics

Absent:

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

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

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

Special Guest Presentation

Lisa Newsome, Superintendent Ashtabula Area City Schools

Ashtabula Area City Schools Superintendent Lisa Newsome delivered a comprehensive update on the status of Lakeside High School reconstruction, district operations, strategic planning, and finances. She began by clarifying a common community misconception that only the academic wing of the building, which formed a U-shaped structure, was demolished, not the entire building. The demolition of the two-story academic wing was completed in February 2026. On March 23, 2026, the Board approved an agreement with Green Space for repair and replacement of the roof system of the remaining back portion of the building, encompassing the auditorium, auxiliary gym, main gym, and approximately ten classrooms, at a cost of \$7.5 million. The interior of this back section was not damaged in the original incident. The decision was made to repair that part of the building so they could get back into part of the high school.

The district remains in active litigation with Liberty Mutual Insurance. Mrs. Newsome noted that the parties have not yet entered mediation, and estimated it could be close to two years before construction could formally begin under the current trajectory. She expressed a firm goal to vacate the temporary Lakeside 9 location at Mother of Sorrows and return students to the Lakeside High School campus from January through March 2027, with the contractor's projected completion being April 2027. She noted the project is ahead of schedule. Upon return, students will have access to the shop room, band room, art room, weight room, choir facilities, and a newly constructed science laboratory. The gymnasium floor will be refinished. The organ donated by the late Bud Hill,

which is housed on the auditorium stage and remains undamaged, will be available for use. Mrs. Newsome stated adamantly that the Class of 2027 will graduate in the gymnasium at Lakeside High School.

The district plans to replace the entire roof. Mrs. Newsome stated that Liberty Mutual has offered to cover only approximately \$600,000 for a limited number of damaged trusses, while the district's position is that the entire roof system must be replaced, as the failure of one truss compromises the entire system. The district was covered for \$288 million at the time of the loss and had paid its premiums. Liberty Mutual dropped the district's coverage the day after the snowfall event; a replacement insurer picked up the district three days later. Mrs. Newsome also noted that Liberty Mutual has separately indicated to the Canfield School district that its premiums were increasing due to the Lakeside High School payout, a claim she characterized as false, as the insurer has not paid the claim.

Mrs. Newsome stated that each elementary building sustained approximately \$500,000 in roof damage attributed to the same snowstorm, which Liberty Mutual is also denying. That claim has been added to the existing lawsuit. The district is actively pursuing avenues to obtain upfront funding to begin construction ahead of a legal settlement, so that insurance proceeds can be used to repay those funds upon resolution.

Regarding the long-term rebuilding of the full high school, Mrs. Newsome confirmed that the district, in consultation with its administrative team, has redesigned the facility to reflect current enrollment, scaling it from a capacity of 2,500 down to approximately 1,200 students, while retaining all necessary academic and extracurricular programming. This redesign is intended to be presented during mediation proceedings.

Mrs. Newsome reported that on June 8, 2026, the Board, administration, and staff convened to develop a new strategic plan. The plan encompasses five focus areas:

1. Academics — with particular emphasis on the third-grade reading guarantee and early literacy, as COVID-era learning loss continues to affect kindergarten through second-grade populations district-wide.
2. Family and Community Relationships, and Communication and Attendance — including continued partnerships with community health providers. The district hosts an onsite clinic at Huron, a mobile dental service, and a vision van, allowing students to receive medical services during the school day and thereby reduce absences. The district met its state attendance benchmark for the second consecutive year.
3. Operations, Facilities, and Transportation — maintaining infrastructure while acknowledging that budget pressures from pending state legislation may require adjustments such as shifting seal-coating from annual biennial cycles; and, Technology and Nutrition Services — the district's renewal levy for technology and textbooks failed in the May 2026 election. The administration is evaluating whether to place the levy on the November 2026 ballot. On the nutrition side, the district is returning food service management to an in-house director, a change expected to save the district approximately \$200,000 annually. Mrs. Newsome noted that the quality of food service has improved substantially, with meals now prepared fresh rather than microwaved.
4. Human Resources — for the first time in recent memory, every teaching position is filled except for one science teacher at the high school. All administrators are returning.
5. Finance — the district's fiscal officer received an award for a clean audit with no findings, the eighth consecutive year. The five-year forecast indicates the district must cut approximately \$1 million in the coming budget. Steps already underway include not replacing a retired assistant principal and a departing behavior specialist, and reviewing class sizes to reduce staffing where enrollment permits. Moving out of Mother of Sorrows and eventually, Huron is expected to generate additional savings. Mrs. Newsome projected that by 2027–28, approximately \$1.5 million in annual savings could be achieved.

Mrs. Newsome explained that the administration is working to establish a community levy committee, composed of residents to improve public education and communication about levy purposes. Mrs. Newsome and the fiscal officer are legally prohibited from actively campaigning but may present factual information. The district is also evaluating the feasibility of a school district income tax to reduce reliance on property tax revenue.

Mrs. Newsome stated that the current district enrollment stands at approximately 2,865 students. The district has over 100 open enrollment students coming in, while approximately 750 students open enroll out, with 640 of those attending Buckeye School. The district also contends with approximately 250 students on home instruction, a number that has grown following an Ohio Department of Education rule change eliminating curriculum submission and assessment requirements for homeschooled students.

Vice Chair Terence Guerriero asked about the grade-level configuration when the district moves out of the Mother of Sorrows building. Mrs. Newsome explained that all high school students will operate between two buildings, the Lakeside High School campus on Sanborn Road and the current Huron facility, with midday transportation accommodating students who need to access specialty programs (band, choir, art, science lab, shop) at the high school campus in the morning and core academic courses at Huron. The master schedule has been designed accordingly. Regarding the junior high building, Mrs. Newsome noted it operates at capacity (525 students) and is currently the district's highest-performing building at a 4-star rating. She firmly rejected suggestions from some community members to repurpose it as an alternative high school facility, stating that a suitable addition to accommodate 800 high school students would cost approximately \$25 million, at which point it would be more practical to simply rebuild the high school.

The district's annual Back-to-School Bash is scheduled for Monday, August 10, 2026, from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m. at the stadium. This year's event will feature 58 vendors and is expected to draw over 1,200 attendees. Services available will include free haircuts from nine participating hairdressers, school supplies, schedules, vaccinations from local health departments, and physicals from the school-based clinic. The first day of school is August 24, 2026.

City Manager's Report

City Manager James Timonere provided updates on several active infrastructure projects. Collins Boulevard from Main Avenue to W. 46th Street was closed the previous day, and UIC has begun work on the project. The closure was structured to realize cost and time savings. Columbia Gas is concurrently relocating its line between Main Avenue and Park Avenue, and will shift to the east side upon completion to continue gas line replacement in coordination with the road project.

The City is still awaiting required pre-construction submissions from Koski for the paving project before a pre-construction meeting and project start can be scheduled. The contractor has a firm completion deadline and has been reminded of it.

The Main Avenue Streetscape Project is progressing with work transitioning to the east side of Main Avenue. The west side is substantially complete and was noted to have come out well. Sidewalks on the east side have been removed and work is underway. Light pole deliveries are still anticipated in July, after which streetlights can be restored.

Work is scheduled to begin on the West Avenue, Lake Avenue, and West 19th Street traffic signal and radar installation on Thursday.

Water Pollution Control Report

WPC Report

Water Pollution Control Superintendent Mark Verzella provided the report. The Outfall Relocation Project is ongoing. The first seasonal (spring) mixing zone study has been completed. Midwest Engineering is preparing a preliminary report to submit to Ohio EPA for review and feedback. A second (summer) mixing zone study is tentatively planned for the July 1 to August 30 window, contingent on EPA feedback and logistical coordination involving vessel scheduling, rental acoustic equipment, subcontractors, and suitable weather conditions. Disinfection season is ongoing and running well. Preventative maintenance is being conducted, including rotating primary clarifier tanks in and out of service. Worn components on Primary Tank 3 were replaced. A heat exchanger issue affecting the digesters required repair of a blower and recirculation pump, with that work nearing completion. Toxicity testing and priority pollutant testing were completed as part of the NPDES permit program. The equalization basin experienced pump and check valve issues, which have been repaired. Maintenance on several vehicles was completed. Regarding the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) design, GPD engineers have been onsite extensively, working to reconcile discrepancies between current conditions and archived electrical records. The Waste Management profile is being renewed for grit disposal. The staff will also be participating in several community outreach events. Lastly, the mainline sewer camera has been out for approximately one month for repairs, but a small crawler has remained operational. The mainline camera is expected to return by the end of the week or early the following week. A new cradle assembly capable of accommodating up to 60-inch pipe has been ordered and will be used to video inspect the 42-inch pipe on 7th Street as part of GPD's pump station improvement project to replace the siphon chamber.

Committee Chair Jodi Mills asked for clarification on the timeline for the CIP project. City Manager James

Timonere explained that the City took out two loans, one for the design of the plant and one for the design of the collection system. The design phase of the plant is currently underway. Water Pollution Control Superintendent stated that the challenge is that the design process involves multiple engineering disciplines, HVAC, structural, and electrical, working simultaneously. A preliminary draft CIP plan is expected by late June or early July. He noted the significant logistical challenges involved in upgrading a 1950s-era facility to current standards within a constrained footprint, including placement of new VFDs, heat exchangers, and explosion-proof motors for the digester mixing system upgrade. He indicated that several large capital expenditures anticipated for this year have been deferred to avoid exceeding budget while the CIP design phase is ongoing.

Public Works Report

Public Works Superintendent John Melnik provided the report. Crews are actively engaged in painting, curb and drain repairs, sinkhole remediation, mowing, and stump grinding. He noted that several sinkholes have been traced to Enbridge driving pipeline through existing City storm lines, and that the City intends to pursue reimbursement from Enbridge for the associated repair costs. Ditch elimination work is ongoing in coordination with ODOT. Tree removal and trimming requests continue to accumulate. Public Works Superintendent John Melnik noted that healthy trees are assessed before removal and trimmed where possible, while trees causing sidewalk or sewer damage, or that are dead, are removed. Public Works crews are also preparing for upcoming festival season road closures. Staff will also be doing some resurfacing where the sinkhole repairs have been completed.

Vice Chair Terence Guerriero reported a large fallen tree branch in the vicinity of W. 6th St. or 7th St., west of Lake Avenue. Public Works Superintendent John Melnik agreed to follow up on it.

Committee Chair Jodi Mills reported high grass at 1919 W. 44th Street. Public Works Superintendent John Melnik stated he would get it taken care of.

Vice Chair Terence Guerreiro asked about a property on Columbus Avenue, south of 18th St., with a large pile of blocks and rubble. City Manager James Timonere stated he would have staff follow up on it.

Discussion continued regarding the proposed transition to curbside recycling. City Manager James Timonere reported that staff are looking into the feasibility of leasing, rather than purchasing, dual-rear-end trucks, split 60/40 for refuse and recycling, that would allow simultaneous collection of garbage and recyclables on the same day. At this time, Sanitation is not in a position to do either. For the time being, the proposed collection schedule would move to a Monday through Thursday garbage pickup with alternating Friday recycling pickup.

Vice Chair Terence Guerriero asked if the City would see any cost savings from implementing City-wide curbside recycling. City Manager James Timonere explained that when the City previously rolled out recycling in Wards 1 and 2, it realized approximately a 25 percent reduction in waste tonnage sent to the landfill, which translates to a direct savings in tipping fees. Vice Chair Guerriero stated that he is trying to justify the cost of it when there are other things, like the conditions of City streets, that he feels are more important to spend money on. Committee Chair Jodi Mills stated that over the past five and a half years that she has been on Council, she has never had anyone in her ward call her about wanting curbside recycling. City Manager James Timonere explained that the City has looked at a lot of different ways to fund the program, and he feels it is necessary to spend the money, so all City residents have curbside recycling available to them. He also noted that the Ashtabula County Solid Waste District is scheduled to meet in July and may absorb the cost of distributing the recycling bins and educational materials to residents.

City Manager James Timonere discussed future plans to pave Lake Avenue, from W. 24th Street to Route 20, in conjunction with Aqua Ohio's scheduled waterline replacement next year along that corridor. A preliminary cost estimate for the project, including curb replacement and driveway aprons, is in excess of \$2 million, approximately \$1 million of which would be concrete work. Aqua Ohio is expected to contribute upwards of \$300,000 toward the paving. City Manager James Timonere noted this would represent approximately two and a half years' worth of paving levy funds and that identifying a full funding source remains an ongoing effort.

New Business

Next Meeting

July 28, 2026

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 9:38 a.m. by Committee Chair Jodi Mills.

