



City of Ashtabula
Ashtabula City Council
Safety Forces Committee
Thursday, August 13, 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 8:31 a.m. by Committee Chair Terence Guerriero.

Roll Call

Members Present: Chair: Ward 2 Councilor Terence Guerriero, Vice Chair: Council President John Roskovics

Absent:

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

Ashtabula Department Heads Present: Police Chief Rob Stell, Fire Chief Geoff Cannon

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

Police Department – Chief’s Report

APD July 2026 Stats

Chief Rob Stell reported that calls for service were notably high for the month of July, attributing the elevated volume in part to favorable weather conditions. He highlighted that 15 speeding citations were issued during the month, which represented a significant increase over prior months and was described as an improvement following internal direction to officers to increase traffic enforcement activity.

Discussion followed regarding the department's portable speed display signs. It was noted that the City had invested approximately \$7,000 for two units, one of which is solar-powered and the other battery-operated. Committee members expressed support for the signs and discussed the value of rotating portable units through problem areas around the City to maximize their deterrent effect.

President John Roskovics inquired about the Wine and Walleye Festival and whether there were any issues. Chief Rob Stell confirmed that the event went smoothly, with a strong security presence and no significant incidents despite the large crowds.

Two neighborhood matters were also raised. First, an ongoing anonymous complaint regarding a property at Pennsylvania and 3rd was revisited. The latest allegation involves the property owner storing and renting golf carts from a residential garage. City Manager James Timonere noted that the City has investigated the property on multiple occasions over the years, interviewed neighbors, and has not found substantive evidence of a code

violation. The golf cart presence was believed to be related to local festival activity.

Second, Committee Chair Terence Guerriero referenced ongoing activity at a property on 23rd Street, where cleanup efforts appeared to be underway. City Solicitor Cecilia Cooper confirmed that officers had been present throughout the week to assist with de-escalation, and that the property owner had been formally advised that any equipment or materials retained onsite must be stored within the garage. It was noted that future non-compliance would result in more serious enforcement action.

Fire Department – Chief’s Report

AFD July 2026 Stats

Chief Geoff Cannon reported that both fire and medical calls continue to trend upward, with ambulance call volume contributing to increased department revenue. Mutual aid activity was described as cyclical.

Chief Geoff Cannon highlighted that eight police and fire personnel had just completed a three-day U.S. Coast Guard boat operator certification course, consisting of one classroom day and two days on the water. The training was interrupted mid-course when the crew was dispatched to an active call, locating a vessel approximately ten miles offshore. Chief Geoff Cannon commented that the real-world experience likely enhanced the value of the training. The goal of the cross-training program is to ensure that each shift has qualified personnel available to operate the City's rescue boat without delay when a call comes in. It was noted that the boat had been called into service seven times on the water already in 2026.

Discussion turned to the condition of ladders along the riverbank walls. It was noted that the structures in question are railroad property, and that the broader issue of the deteriorating river wall is part of an ongoing conversation involving the railroad. Chief Geoff Cannon noted that aluminum ladders are present at the transient dock and are in acceptable condition.

The Committee then discussed the status of the Stone Garden federal grant program. It was explained that Stone Garden funding had historically supported homeland security-related boat operations, including Canadian border patrols, as well as fuel, maintenance, and repairs on the City's vessel. A request to use Stone Garden funds to replace the boat's 16-year-old engines was denied by the county sheriff, despite the City having received higher-level authorization to operate the vessel in the absence of a Coast Guard presence at Station Ashtabula. Approximately \$40,000 in engine replacement costs were at issue, and it was noted that \$90,000 in grant funds was returned to the state or border patrol rather than being made available for repairs.

City Manager’s Report

City Manager James Timonere reported on several ongoing matters.

Regarding the Coast Guard Station Ashtabula, he noted that Congressman Joyce's office has been the most active in pursuing the station's reopening, having made multiple inquiries in Washington, D.C. He indicated that senators Husted and Moreno have been largely absent from those efforts. The Coast Guard has been candid in acknowledging that recruiting challenges mean the station is unlikely to reopen within three to five years, and that the original rationale for closing Station Ashtabula, fully staffing Erie and Cleveland, has not been fulfilled. City Manager James Timonere noted that staffing levels at Fairport are also declining.

On staffing, City Manager James Timonere reported that civil service lists for both police and fire examinations are being certified. Two candidates who took the police examination are currently attending the academy and are not yet Ohio Peace Officer Training Academy (OPOTA) certified. It is the City's intent to hire at least one firefighter off the certified list to offset the impact of retirements and injuries, which is expected to produce meaningful overtime savings.

Regarding equipment, the City is awaiting a grant decision for new cardiac monitors for the fire department, which were described as extremely expensive without grant support. For the police department, a response from the Geauga County Sheriff's Office regarding additional used vehicles is expected by the end of August. A new wave of Mobile Data Terminals (MDT) is in the final stages of installation, with most units now deployed on the road.

President John Roskovics noted that the issue of homelessness is likely to resurface as a committee discussion topic, citing recent coverage in the press and constituent calls received by multiple council members.

City Solicitor’s Report

City Solicitor Cecilia Cooper reported that caseload numbers are at an extremely elevated level, with six cases on the jury trial calendar in the prior week alone and approximately three pages of cases awaiting charge review. She noted a concerning upward trend in violent crimes, including domestic violence and assaults, as well as an increase in younger offenders. A recent case involved an 18-year-old charged with stealing four vehicles over the summer, with juvenile co-defendants.

City Solicitor Cecilia Cooper reported that her office has applied for three or four grants and is awaiting results.

Discussion was held regarding a new state house bill that would provide municipalities utilizing civil service with additional flexibility in the police hiring process. Under current rules, lateral hires are limited to officers holding an active OPOTA certificate and currently employed by an Ohio law enforcement agency. The proposed legislation would allow municipalities to hire candidates with specialized skills or certifications who do not meet the current employment requirements. For example, officers who left law enforcement and returned, or those who worked out of state. City Solicitor Cecilia Cooper and City Manager James Timonere indicated support for adopting the framework, but emphasized that the statute as written is vague and that the City would want to define specific qualifying criteria through either a civil service rule amendment or a codified ordinance update before adoption.

Unfinished Business

New Business

Chief Geoff Cannon reported that equipment shipments for the new ladder truck have begun arriving. Per the procurement arrangement, equipment is received locally and then transported to Columbus for mounting. He indicated that an online tracking portal for the build's daily progress is expected to be available to the City by the end of August, and that the current estimated delivery is October. It was noted that, luckily, the City had locked in the purchase price, as the same truck model now costs approximately \$2.2 to 2.3 million, representing an estimated savings of \$500,000.

Next Meeting

September 10, 2026

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 9:00 a.m. by Committee Chair Terence Guerriero.