



City of Ashtabula
Ashtabula City Council Pre-Council Agenda
Monday, August 3, 2026 at 6:00 PM
Council Chambers
4230 Lake Avenue, Ashtabula, OH 44004

Minutes

Opening of a Pre-Council Meeting

Call to Order

The Pre-Council meeting of the Ashtabula City Council was called to order at 6:00 p.m. by President John Roskovics.

Roll Call

Members Present: President John Roskovics, Vice President Russell Simeone, Ward 2 Councilor Terence Guerriero, Ward 3 Councilor RoLesia Holman, Ward 4 Councilor Jodi Mills, Ward 5 Councilor Jane DiGiacomo
Absent: None

Officers Present: City Manager James Timonere, City Solicitor Cecilia Cooper, Finance Director Vladimir Kan and Clerk of Council Stacy Millberg

Welcome and Acknowledgement of Visitors

President's Report and Regular Meeting Review

President John Roskovics announced that the next Regular Council meeting is scheduled for August 17 at 6 p.m. He reminded members that Council is still down one member, and outlined the resulting voting implications: a 3-3 tie would be recorded as a loss, and any measure passing with 4 votes would require a 30-day waiting period before taking effect.

President John Roskovics noted that the Democratic Party is holding interviews on August 4 to fill the vacant Council seat, with an announcement expected by Friday, August 7, which would meet the 45-day deadline. He expressed optimism that a new Council member may be seated by the August 17th meeting.

Administrative Reports

City Manager

City Manager James Timonere presented the following ordinances for consideration:

- An ordinance authorizing a contract with AM Ford in Jeferson for the purchase of a Ford Maverick for an amount not to exceed \$28,995, to be funded from Fund 412. The vehicle is intended for the Planning and Community Development Department, replacing a 2010 Ford Explorer that had developed transmission and electrical problems. City Manager James Timonere noted that the Explorer had previously served both the fire chief and fire marshal and had reached the end of its useful life. Council discussion confirmed the truck-style vehicle would be practical for department needs such as transporting lumber for boarding up properties. City Manager James Timonere noted that the purchase was possible locally because AM Ford came in at or under the state purchasing price.

City Manager James Timonere reported that the City is still soliciting bids for liability insurance, which expires at the end of August. An ordinance is expected to be presented at the August 17th meeting, with relevant information to be forwarded to Council in advance.

City Manager James Timonere extended recognition and gratitude to all volunteers, City staff, and the Lift Bridge Community Association for their work on the Wine and Walleye Festival, describing it as one of the largest in the event's history. Approximately 1,500 pounds of walleye were served by the fire and police departments over the weekend, and attendance in the wine tent area far exceeded prior years. He also credited members of the Lakeside High School football team who assisted with post-festival cleanup, noting Bridge Street was restored and reopened by approximately 7 to 8 p.m. Sunday.

City Manager James Timonere requested an Executive Session, at the conclusion of the Regular Council meeting, to discuss the purchase or sale of property.

President John Roskovics thanked Norfolk and Southern Railroad for clearing the hillside on East 6th Street along the river, noting widespread positive community reaction to the improved sightliness to the boat clubs and river. City Manager James Timonere noted that the Planning and Community Development Department reached out to their contacts with the railroad and coordinated the work in advance of the festival.

City Manager James Timonere provided an update on both the Collins Boulevard project and Main Avenue sidewalk project. He reported that the Main Avenue sidewalk work was nearing completion, with light poles installed that day. Collins Boulevard is progressing well, though additional sidewalk replacement has been identified. The City is negotiating pricing with the contractor for those additional sections to determine whether it would be part of this contract or whether to do it as part of another contract. He noted that a slight change order may be presented to Council at a future meeting. Ward 3 Councilor RoLesia Holman asked who was requesting the additional sidewalks and where. City Manager James Timonere stated that it would be along the Collins Boulevard project, mostly in the areas behind Signature Health on the curve. He noted there was also a small section between Main Avenue and Park Avenue near KeyBank.

Ward 2 Councilor Terence Guerriero relayed a request for a slow child at play sign on Columbus Avenue and 18th. He also noted a tree that fell at the west end of E. 23rd during a recent storm. The tree was hanging against the wires. Ward 2 Councilor Terence Guerriero also reported that a resident on W. 9th inquired about when stumps from recently removed trees would be taken care of. City Manager James Timonere explained that the stumps are not removed immediately after the trees. A list is compiled, and then City staff goes around and takes care of them. Ward 2 Councilor Terence Guerriero also reported a concern about a section of Harbor Avenue between 22nd and 23rd and requested it be addressed and somehow smoothed out before the winter.

Ward 5 Councilor Jane DiGiacomo brought up a possible solution to the recurring problem of bicycles, scooters and e-bikes riding on the sidewalks. She stated that while on vacation, in the downtown area, the City she visited had signage that said "No bicycles, e-bikes, and scooters on the sidewalks." She said the signs were very tasteful and recommended the City consider installing similar signs. City Manager James Timonere agreed to look into it. Ward 5 Councilor Jane DiGiacomo also reported receiving complaints about vehicles parking in yards. She asked for clarification on the procedure for reporting the vehicles. City Manager James Timonere stated that it should be reported to the Planning and Community Development Department. Ward 5 Councilor Jane DiGiacomo also asked about the status of the Memorial Naming Committee as she received a request for a memorial for the last survivor of the Titanic that lived here. President John Roskovics explained that the committee only had two members, one of whom was Mrs. Foglio, who recently resigned from Council. City Manager James Timonere stated that there was discussion about the memorial at the last Parks & Recreation Board meeting, and it was suggested to contact the Marine Museum as that may be a good location for some type of plaque. That would not require going through the Memorial Committee.

Finance Director

Finance Director Vladimir Kan presented the following ordinances for consideration:

- An ordinance to make supplemental changes to appropriations to the 205 State County Municipal Roads/Public Works Fund in the amount of \$35,000.
- An ordinance enacting the City of Ashtabula Budgetary General Fund Reserve Policy.

Ward 4 Councilor Jodi Mills asked for clarification on the minimum fund balance indicated in the policy. Finance Director Vladimir Kan clarified that the policy established a minimum fund balance of no less than two months of expenditures (approximately 16.67 percent, or roughly \$2.3 million), with a recommended ceiling of 50 percent. He

also noted that Ashtabula currently holds reserves equivalent to approximately 46 percent of 2026 expenses, above cities such as Fairview Park and Defiance, but well below communities with reserves exceeding 100 or even 200 percent of annual expenditures. President John Roskovics requested that Ashtabula's figures be added to the comparative analysis previously shared with Council for context. Ward 4 Councilor Jodi Mills sought clarification on a provision regarding enterprise fund subsidies, specifically the requirement that utility fee increases must have occurred at least once within the immediately preceding two fiscal years before a subsidy from the General Fund would be authorized. Finance Director Vladimir Kan explained this provision is intended to ensure that enterprise funds make good-faith efforts to be self-sustaining before drawing on General Fund resources.

City Solicitor

City Solicitor Cecilia Cooper presented the following ordinances for consideration:

- An ordinance to grant Emily Bussanich, the Victim Advocate in the Solicitor's Office, credit for prior public service at the Ashtabula County Juvenile Court, dating to October 2024, for the purpose of accruing vacation time. Because Ms. Bussanich is a non-union employee, the automatic credit for prior service in another political subdivision, which is standard in union contracts, was not applied at the time of her hire. The ordinance would make her consistent with union employees in that regard, effective January 1, 2027, to simplify administration for the Finance Department. No retroactive vacation payout was requested. City Manager James Timonere confirmed that the language mirroring this credit is already part of the non-union benefits package and that it is unclear why it was not applied to this individual.

City Solicitor Cecilia Cooper also provided an update on Harbor Ridge. A second request for injunctive relief has been filed, with Harbor Ridge having 20 days to respond. Building C has not passed the City's inspection and is required to remain vacant. There had been confusion on the part of Harbor Ridge management about whether tenants could be returned to the building without City approval for occupancy. City Solicitor Cecilia Cooper noted that the plumbing issue had reportedly been resolved, but the resulting damage had not been fully repaired before tenants were moved back in, prompting building inspectors to halt the process. President John Roskovics expressed concern about the impact on families with school beginning soon, and City Solicitor Cecilia Cooper affirmed that the goal is to achieve clear compliance directives and a clear response from Harbor Ridge before any occupancy is permitted.

President John Roskovics noted that work had resumed on the apartments on Route 20 near Taco Bell and asked if they were close to being rented and if inspections would take place prior to them being rented. City Manager James Timonere confirmed that work had resumed, and the units would be inspected before being rented. He noted that the owner plans to bring 12 to 24 units online initially.

Clerk of Council

Clerk of Council Stacy Millberg advised that the Ohio Division of Liquor Control issued notice that all Class C and D liquor permits for retail establishments in the City will expire on October 1, requiring renewal. Council members wishing to object to any renewal were encouraged to do so during this timeframe.

Ward 5 Councilor Jane DiGiacomo asked about certificates of recognition for two new businesses in Ward 5 that have not had ribbon cuttings. Clerk of Council Stacy Millberg confirmed that she could prepare those upon request.

City Council Committee Reports

Community Development/Economic Development/Parks & Recreation

(1st Wednesday @ 5:30 p.m.)

Members: Chair DiGiacomo/Council Liaison to Parks and Recreation Board; Vice Chair Holman; Simeone

August 5

September 2

October 7

November 4

December 2

Finance & Personnel

(3rd Friday @ 8:30 a.m.)

Members: Chair Roskovics, Vice Chair DiGiacomo, Mills

August 21

September 18

October 16

November 20

December 18

Public Works/Public Utilities/Cable/Schools

(4th Tuesday @ 8:30 a.m.)

Members: Chair Mills, Vice Chair Guerriero, Roskovics

August 25

September 22

October 27

November 24

December 22

Committee Chair Jodi Mills provided the report.

Safety Forces

(2nd Thursday @ 8:30 a.m.)

Members: Chair Guerriero, Vice Chair Roskovics, Vacant

August 13

September 10

October 8

November 12

December 10

Committee Chair Terence Guerriero reported one item on the Regular Meeting agenda for first reading: Ordinance 2026-142, which would require house address numbers to be posted on the rear of properties with back-alley driveways, in addition to the existing front-facing requirement. The rationale is to improve identification for emergency responders and delivery services navigating alleys. Discussion identified two items to be addressed before second reading: the addition of a compliance deadline (tentatively four to six months) and a cross-reference to the existing code section specifying required signage size, which is addressed in Section 1329 and need not be duplicated in the ordinance.

Planning Commission and Ashtabula Historic Preservation Commission

Discussion of New Business/Proposed Legislation

Council engaged in discussion regarding the tax abatement request appearing on the Regular Meeting agenda, for a new residential construction project on E. 15th Street.

Ward 5 Councilor Jane DiGiacomo stated that she intends to vote no on the abatement, expressing that while she views abatements as a valuable redevelopment tool in general, she has reservations about approving a 100 percent, 7-year abatement for a long-term rental property, given that the City's rental rate is already approaching 50 percent.

President John Roskovics asked, since there is always discussion about abatements, if any councilor could quantify the difference in City revenue between a 100 percent abatement and a reduced abatement at 75 or 50 percent. He questioned the reason behind several councilors consistently voting against abatements and sought clarification on what their vote is based on. Ward 3 Councilor RoLesia Holman explained that she has always questioned 100 percent for 7 years since she started on Council because she believes it should be a win-win situation where the City can collect some taxes to pay for its services, as well as benefit the applicant. She stated that she does not believe Council should rubber stamp every single abatement that comes through at 100 percent for 7 years. She stated that she also believes the application should ask for additional information so that Council is better informed before simply voting yes for every single abatement that comes through. She acknowledged that her reluctance is because it is just so open without any consideration for what the City might be losing and what it could also gain, in addition to approving abatement for the applicants. She stated that Council should be more thoughtful when voting to approve them.

Ward 2 Councilor Terence Guerriero acknowledged that Ward 3 Councilor RoLesia Holman raised a lot of valid points, but pointed out that this particular property had been a vacant lot for many years and that new construction there represents a genuine community benefit.

City Manager James Timonere noted that even in a rental scenario, new occupants will generate income tax revenue the City has never previously collected from the vacant parcel, and will contribute to sewer and sanitation revenues, representing incremental financial benefit to the City beyond property tax.

Discussion of Old Business/Legislation on for 2nd Reading

A brief discussion took place regarding proposed legislation for a Thriving Communities Commission. It was suggested that a work session be held before the next Regular Meeting on August 17, 2026, to allow for more time to discuss the legislation.

Discussion for the Good of the Order

Ward 5 Councilor Jane DiGiacomo raised concerns regarding the condition of properties and the condition of roads, which she stated are the two most common concerns she hears from residents. She asked whether the City was delivering value where residents notice it most. She stated that residents want neighborhoods that are clean, well maintained, and inviting. They want to see continued progress in neighborhood maintenance. They also want roads that are safe and in good repair. She stated that she appreciates the work the City staff does every day to serve the community, but she believes it is Council's responsibility to regularly evaluate their priorities and ensure they reflect the needs and concerns they hear from the people they represent.

City Manager James Timonere responded, noting that property enforcement and road conditions have consistently been among the City's top priorities. He cited the work of the City's two inspectors, the challenges of obtaining meaningful court penalties (noting a recent instance where a visiting judge levied \$5 fines for fireworks violations), the impact of two severe winters on road conditions, and the complexities of coordinating paving with utilities and ODOT. He acknowledged the City is currently operating at a deficit and that any new expenditure must be offset by a corresponding reduction elsewhere.

City Solicitor Cecilia Cooper reinforced that the City has only two inspectors and one assistant solicitor to handle all building complaints citywide. She noted that the City has been escalating enforcement by pursuing both criminal and civil citations simultaneously, but that the pace of progress is constrained by the court process and available staff.

City Manager James Timonere added that, as the new zoning code is finalized, the City is exploring the addition of a zoning officer who could also assist with utility road cuts and other inspection functions. He noted that department budget submissions are due by the end of August, and that staffing and resource decisions will be shaped by the resulting revenue projections.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 7:01 p.m. by Council President Roskovics.

Ashtabula City Council will meet again on Monday, August 17, 2026 in Council Chambers. The Pre-Council meeting will begin at 6:00 p.m. followed by the Regular Council Meeting at 7:00 p.m.

DATE APPROVED:

August 17, 2026

ATTESTED BY:

John S. Roskovics
John S. Roskovics, President of Council

ATTESTED BY:

Stacy L. Millberg
Stacy L. Millberg, Clerk of Council