



**Ravenna City Council
Planning Committee Meeting Minutes
March 9, 2026**

The public meeting was held in person in City Council Chambers.

Council present: Council President Rob Kairis, Amy Michael, Paul Moskun, Tyler Marovich, Tim Calfee, Christina West, Matt Harper, Carmen Laudato

Also attending the meeting: Mayor Frank Seman; Police Chief, Jake Smallfield; Service Director, Tim Contant; City Engineer; Bob Finney; Finance Director, Tami Lorence; Council Clerk, Chelsea Gregor; Larry Silenius, Barbara Niemiller, Mark Hartburg, Trevor Martin, Amy Young, Eric Schlaubach, Barb Springer, William Barber, Justin Barber, Joseph Osborne, Iris Meltzer, Cheryl Wood, Todd Peetz, Ryann Cline, Kristy Huhn, Cynthia Miller, Lou Dudek, Alexander Zaventink, Susie Kohl, David Fosnight, Jen Kinney, Cliff Soudil, Tiffany Jones, Cathy Klein, Molly Halliday, Chester Halliday

Planning Committee Meeting was called to order at 6:44 P.M. by member, Tim Calfee

The first item was a presentation by Trevor Martin from the League of Women Voters.

Ms. Laudato introduced the first item regarding Ward redistricting in coordination with the League of Women Voters. She explained that Ravenna's Ward and precinct boundaries had not been reviewed in over 50 years, resulting in significant population imbalances, particularly in Ward 3 due to newer developments like Annevar and Diamond Hills. She emphasized the importance of equitable representation, noting that disproportionate populations place unequal burdens on Council members.

Trevor Martin, Program Coordinator for the League of Women Voters of Ohio, addressed City Council and described the League's long-standing, nonpartisan work advocating for fair redistricting and public participation. Mr. Martin explained that redistricting ensures equal representation and highlighted the concept of "communities of interest," stressing the importance of keeping socially and economically connected groups together. He shared his experience working with municipalities across Ohio, including Cleveland, Nelsonville, and Warren, to guide transparent, community-driven redistricting processes. Mr. Martin stated that Ravenna is currently out of compliance due to malapportionment, with a population deviation of approximately 62%, far exceeding the generally accepted 10% threshold. He noted that while many municipalities have fallen behind on redistricting, the decennial census requires adjustments to maintain equal population distribution. Mr. Martin encouraged the City to adopt a transparent process with strong public input, ultimately leading to more representative governance.

Ms. Michael asked about ideal population targets per Ward and how to begin the process.

Mr. Martin explained that while the average Ward population would be around 2,831 residents, the goal is to stay within a $\pm 5\%$ range while prioritizing community integrity and minimizing disruption. He suggested using mapping tools and public engagement to guide adjustments.

Mr. Calfee clarified that while the 10% deviation is a commonly accepted standard, some flexibility exists depending on circumstances such as geography or community considerations.

Mr. Martin confirmed this, noting that courts have occasionally allowed deviations above 10% with sufficient justification.

Ms. Laudato pointed out the practical impact of the imbalance, noting that Mr. Harper, representing Ward 3, serves significantly more residents than other Council members.

Mr. Calfee added that factors such as geography and neighborhood cohesion should also be considered in redistricting decisions.

Mr. Kairis raised questions about the process, asking whether the Council or external experts would develop mapping proposals.

Mr. Martin explained that while the final decision rests with Council, options include working with consultants, forming committees, or engaging the public directly. He strongly recommended hosting public meetings to gather input before drafting maps and forming an ad hoc redistricting committee.

Ms. Laudato supported this approach, emphasizing fairness and the need to address the significant deviation.

Mr. Kairis agreed that action was necessary and raised concerns about how residents would be notified of Ward changes.

Mr. Martin explained that the Board of Elections would handle official notifications but encouraged the City and local organizations to assist with public education. He also noted that new Ward maps must be adopted by ordinance at least 150 days before the next municipal primary, giving the city until December 2026 to complete the process.

Ms. Laudato expressed appreciation for the data-driven presentation and advocated moving forward quickly with establishing a redistricting committee.

Ms. Michael recommended consulting local historian Mark Bowen for archival information.

- The item was moved forward.

The second item was the Comprehensive Plan.

Ms. Laudato introduced the Comprehensive Plan and invited Todd Peetz to speak.

Mr. Peetz opened by explaining that he would provide a brief overview and primarily answer any questions Council had.

Mr. Kairis noted that updates had been made to the plan since binders were distributed, including the addition of Sunbeau Valley Farms to city park references and related materials.

Mr. Peetz confirmed these updates and emphasized that the comprehensive plan is a “living document” that can be revised over time.

Ms. Laudato expressed support for the plan but raised concerns that it reads more like a vision statement than a detailed implementation plan. She identified the lack of clear zoning reform guidance as a primary issue, noting that while the plan includes existing and future land use maps, it does not clearly outline how to transition between them. Ms. Laudato stressed that without regulatory changes, many of the plan’s goals would be difficult to achieve.

Mr. Peetz acknowledged these concerns, explaining that the plan was intentionally written with some flexibility to avoid restricting future Council decisions and budget priorities. He agreed, however, that implementation could be more clearly defined and suggested adding strategies to outline a step-by-step process. Mr. Peetz emphasized the importance of community engagement, noting that zoning changes should be introduced gradually with public input to avoid backlash and ensure transparency.

Ms. Laudato reiterated the need for a clearer roadmap, particularly for zoning implementation, and emphasized that the plan's success depends on actionable steps rather than broad goals. She also highlighted the importance of identifying specific areas for mixed-use or higher-density development, noting that current zoning regulations would not support some of the plan's housing and development objectives.

Mr. Kairis suggested that Mr. Peetz incorporate updates before the next meeting and encouraged Council members to provide additional feedback. He also pointed out that the plan already calls for a future review of the city's zoning code, which could address many of the concerns raised, though he noted that such a review would be a lengthy process.

Ms. Laudato further emphasized the need for measurable outcomes and clearer timelines within the plan. She expressed concern that terms like "short-term," "mid-term," and "long-term" are too vague and suggested adding more specific benchmarks, particularly for critical issues such as traffic safety and crash reduction.

Mr. Peetz responded that Council ultimately determines priorities and timelines, but agreed that additional clarity could be incorporated. He noted that some efforts, such as crash data analysis, are ongoing and involve external agencies.

Ms. Laudato concluded by reiterating that the most critical improvement would be adding clear zoning implementation guidance, along with more defined timelines for key initiatives. She encouraged Council members to review the plan and suggest refinements, particularly for public safety goals.

Mr. Peetz agreed to incorporate the requested updates, including zoning implementation strategies, before the next meeting.

Ms. Laudato thanked him and reiterated her goal of moving the comprehensive plan toward adoption as efficiently as possible.

- The item was moved forward.

The third item was a property request by David Fosnight.

The committee considered a property request from David Fosnight, with Ms. Laudato introducing the item and asking for clarification on why it was coming before Council. She noted that Mr. Fosnight was seeking some form of city action, possibly an easement or land transfer, to construct an additional garage.

David Fosnight explained that his request involved a portion of undeveloped land at the end of Woodbend Drive, which aligns with a potential extension of Highland Avenue. He provided historical context, recalling a past instance where the city abandoned a street and divided the land between adjacent property owners. Mr. Fosnight expressed concern that, although the land is currently a swamp, it could eventually be developed and used as a roadway connecting to State Route 14, potentially increasing traffic through his neighborhood. He stated that acquiring the land would both prevent future road development and allow him to construct an additional garage or outbuilding, adding taxable value to the property.

Ms. Laudato asked Mr. Fosnight to clarify his request, and he outlined three options: the City could abandon the land and divide it between adjacent owners, transfer the entire parcel to him, or sell it to him.

Mr. Fosnight emphasized that even if construction were not approved, he would still value securing the land to prevent future roadway development.

Mr. Kairis raised procedural concerns, noting that Mr. Fosnight would likely need approval from the Board of Zoning Appeals (BZA) for additional structures. He cautioned that even if Council approved the land transfer, the BZA could still deny the project.

Mr. Finney added that multiple variances would likely be required due to zoning limitations. He also raised significant concerns about the property itself, explaining that it contains city utilities, including a water line and drainage infrastructure, which typically prevents the City from selling or vacating such land. Mr. Finney noted that while the City has abandoned streets in the past, those cases generally did not involve utilities.

Ms. Laudato expressed hesitation, stating that the proposal raised too many unanswered questions to move forward. She emphasized concerns about environmental impact, drainage, and the presence of public utilities.

Ms. Michael agreed, noting the need for further information before making any decision and cautioning against giving Mr. Fosnight false expectations.

Mr. Calfee added that the committee should consider long-term implications, including whether abandoning the potential Highland Avenue extension would eliminate future development opportunities. He also raised concerns about how a new structure might affect the surrounding neighborhood.

Ms. Laudato questioned whether the City had ever abandoned property with utilities in place.

Mr. Finney responded that, in his experience, it had not. He reiterated that Mr. Fosnight's request was before Council specifically because it involved City-owned land, but he had previously indicated that approval was unlikely.

Ms. Soudil provided historical context about similar property situations in the area. He noted that land conditions and drainage issues have changed over time and suggested that development potential and access points should be carefully evaluated before making a decision.

Ms. Laudato stated that the matter would remain in committee for further review and indicated that additional research, including site evaluation and consultation with City Administration, would be necessary before any action could be considered.

- The item was for discussion only.

The fourth item was approval of the CAC Summer Food Program.

Ms. Laudato addressed the CAC Summer Food Program and explained that the summer food program is an annual initiative that is familiar to Council.

Ms. Michael clarified that no city funds are involved, as the program is fully provided by the organization, and Council's role is simply to enter into an agreement.

- The item was moved forward.

The fifth item was a discussion regarding a City Manager.

Ms. Laudato introduced exploring the creation of a City Manager position, explaining that she had raised the topic previously and was gathering information from other communities that operate under a city manager system, including Hudson, Kent, Westerville, and Steubenville. She noted that Hudson's experience was different because it has had a city manager since 1958, making it less comparable, and stated that she preferred to keep the matter in committee until additional responses and comparative data were received.

Ms. Laudato described the goal as improving efficiency, coordination, communication between departments, and strengthening economic development efforts. She indicated she intended to prepare a detailed presentation once more research was compiled.

Mayor Seman stated that he believed the issue should at least be examined, noting that governance models evolve over time and that future structural changes should be considered for the city's long-term benefit. He emphasized that he was not personally advocating for the change but felt it warranted discussion.

Ms. Michael shared that several City employees had expressed support for exploring the idea, citing concerns about consistency, leadership turnover, and job stability. She acknowledged there were both pros and cons and agreed it should be reviewed carefully, ultimately noting that voters would decide.

Ms. West stated that the topic was not new and had been discussed during prior Charter Review efforts, though it was challenging due to time constraints and the complexity of the process.

Mr. Kairis clarified that placing a Charter amendment on the ballot would require five Council votes and noted that Kent adopted a city manager system in 1977, suggesting additional communities could be researched for more recent comparisons.

Discussion continued regarding governance structure, including how a city manager system would alter the Mayor's role and whether duties would remain ceremonial or change in scope.

Mr. Calfee emphasized that the issue had been reviewed in prior Charter committees dating back many years, that implementation would represent a significant structural change, and that cost estimates, including salary and benefits, would need to be carefully evaluated.

Additional comments addressed historical context, potential cost comparisons, candidate pools for leadership roles, and procedural pathways for advancing a Charter amendment.

Mr. Marovich noted that although the topic had been considered during prior Charter reviews, time constraints and the scope of work prevented a formal recommendation at that time.

Ms. Laudato concluded by reiterating her desire to keep the discussion in committee while gathering more data, emphasizing her intention to present findings in a structured format for future Council review.

- The item was for discussion only.

Management Update

There being no further business for discussion, the meeting adjourned at 7:21 P.M.

ATTEST:

Clerk of Council

**Carmen Laudato, Chairperson
Planning Committee**