Ravenna City Council
Planning Committee Meeting Minutes
April 13, 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: Police Chief, Jake Smallfield; Service Director, Tim Contant; City Engineer; Bob Finney; Finance Director, Tami Lorence; Council Clerk, Chelsea Gregor; Cynthia Miller, William Barber, Eve Francis, Dirk Remley, Cliff Soudil, Cheryl Wood, Amy Young, Ramy Mansour, Barb Niemiller, Joni Halloway, Ryann Cline, Susie Kohl, Larry Selinius, Mark Pantalone, Valerie Pantalone, Peter Martin, Greg Francis

Planning Committee Meeting was called to order at 7:25 P.M. by member, Carmen Laudato

The first item was Data Centers.
Ms. Laudato clarified that the agenda item regarding data centers was included in error, as the topic had already been discussed during a special Planning Committee meeting held on April 10. She noted that additional discussion and potential action on a proposed data center moratorium would occur during the Committee of the Whole meeting on April 20.
Ms. Michael encouraged public participation and invited residents who were unable to attend the special meeting to share their comments at future meetings.
Mr. Finney addressed concerns regarding potential water usage by data centers. He stated that the City would not guarantee a dedicated water supply for cooling purposes and emphasized that applicants would be required to provide alternative cooling methods or backup systems. Mr. Finney noted that protecting the City's water infrastructure remains a priority.
Mr. Kairis explained that the proposed moratorium would provide Council with time to study the issue and develop regulations governing data center development.
Ms. Laudato added that a moratorium is more legally defensible than an outright ban and would allow the City to establish appropriate standards and restrictions.

- The item was for discussion only.

The second item was City Manager.
Ms. Laudato introduced discussion on a potential transition to a council-manager form of government, explaining that it would replace an elected mayor’s primary administrative responsibilities with a professionally trained city manager appointed by Council based on qualifications and experience. She noted that over 100 Ohio communities—including Kent, Hudson, Mentor, Chardon, Brunswick, and Steubenville—use the council-manager model. She outlined potential advantages such as professionalized administration, operational continuity, reduced political influence in daily management, improved long-term planning, and stronger grant-writing capacity. Ms. Laudato also acknowledged concerns, including reduced direct voter

control, possible community disconnect, and increased personnel costs. She explained that adopting this system would require significant amendments to the City Charter, including redefining the mayor's role, establishing qualifications and duties for a city manager, and restructuring reporting relationships for city departments. Ms. Laudato emphasized that the discussion should focus on governance structure rather than individual elected officials.

Ms. Michael supported further exploration of the model, citing the need for consistent leadership and noting that staff had also expressed interest in the concept.

Mr. Calfee cautioned that placing such a proposal on the November 2026 ballot may be unrealistic due to the extensive charter revisions required. He also emphasized the importance of maintaining local representation and noted prior Charter Review Commissions had not advanced the proposal.

Mr. Kairis stated that implementing a council-manager system would require a comprehensive rewrite of the charter and code, given how extensively the mayor's role is embedded. He suggested the issue may be better suited for a future Charter Review Commission or a dedicated study group.

Mr. Marovich noted that previous Charter Review Commissions struggled with time constraints and the complexity of reviewing the full charter, suggesting additional support and background materials for future efforts.

Ms. West, a former Charter Review Commission member, agreed that the scope of work was substantial and warranted further study before any decision.

During public comment, concerns were raised about why smaller cities like Ravenna would consider a city manager model when larger cities do not use it.

Council members responded that larger municipalities operate under different structures, and it was noted that several major U.S. cities outside Ohio do utilize city manager systems.

Former Charter Review Commission member Barbara Niemiller recalled that earlier discussions were influenced by political considerations and encouraged more thorough future study.

Mr. Kairis concluded by inviting interested Council members and residents to participate in an informal group to further evaluate the feasibility of the council-manager form of government, with Ms. Laudato expressing interest in contributing to research.

- The item was for discussion only.

The third item was an appointed Law Director.

Ms. Laudato stated that moving to an appointed Law Director was urgent and could be placed on the November ballot. She argued that appointing rather than electing the position would expand the candidate pool, remove campaign requirements, and allow the City to hire based on qualifications and experience. Ms. Laudato also emphasized benefits such as improved availability of legal counsel, reduced reliance on outside attorneys, and potential cost savings from avoiding litigation. She referenced prior Charter changes, including the Finance Director transition, as precedent and urged timely action to meet ballot deadlines.

Ms. Michael supported further consideration, noting that an appointed Law Director would improve access to legal counsel and increase consistency, while reducing dependence on outside legal services.

Ms. West asked about compensation, and Ms. Laudato acknowledged that a full-time appointed position would likely increase salary costs but could be offset by reduced outside legal expenses.

Mr. Kairis expressed caution, noting the current Law Director’s effectiveness and institutional knowledge, while raising concerns about significant cost increases and the need for careful drafting. He recommended moving the matter to Committee of the Whole and suggested a public hearing due to its importance.
Mr. Calfee supported an appointed model for improved accountability but questioned whether a full-time position was financially necessary, noting that many communities use part-time appointed attorneys and rely on specialists as needed. He also raised concerns about residency restrictions limiting applicants.
Mr. Finney and Mr. Marovich raised concerns about consolidating too much authority in the Mayor’s office, citing risks to checks and balances and oversight.
In contrast, Cliff Soudil supported the appointed model, citing easier removal of underperforming appointees and the competitive legal job market.
Mr. Kairis clarified that any Charter amendment would require detailed ordinance language and approval by five Council members.
Council members discussed potential appointment structures, including mayoral appointments with Council confirmation or direct Council appointment, and agreed to advance the proposal to Committee of the Whole for further refinement in consultation with the Law Director.

- The item was moved forward.

The fourth item was the Northeast Ohio Disc Golf Grant Award.
Ms. Laudato briefly explained a Northeast Ohio Disc Golf grant award of approximately $1,000 for Disc Golf signage improvements at tee locations. The ordinance is to accept and document the grant funds.

- The item was moved forward.

Management Update

There being no further business for discussion, the meeting adjourned at 8:42 P.M.

ATTEST:

Clerk of Council	**Carmen Laudato, Chairperson** **Planning Committee**