

LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE MINUTES
Of June 15, 2026

In Attendance: Vermilion City Council: *Jeff Lucas, Council President; Gary Howell, Council at Large. John Gabriel, Ward One; Greg Drew, Ward Two; Drew Werley, Ward Three; Homer Taft, Ward Four; Alec Bonawit, Ward Five; Melanie Wood, Clerk of Council.*

Administration: Russ Owens, Mayor; Chris Howard, City Engineer; Chad Angney, Finance Director; Tony Pecora, Law Director; Scott Orille, Assistant Law Director.

Call to Order: Greg Drew, Chairperson, RESOLVED THAT this Legislative Committee comprised of the committee of the whole has now come to order.

TOPIC ONE: Additional Committees Times and Days

Homer Taft said he had communicated to everyone last time about a special meeting for the Charter review and now they have that because he knew the Charter Review Committee wanted to meet with them. In looking over things, there is an awful lot of things in their Ordinances that need to be addressed but perhaps in all those things, the zoning code is seriously out of date. He is thinking over the next year or so they might want to review that and that was one of the issues he wanted to bring to everyone's attention to see what they thought about it. He can see a lot of things that are in there that are very old-school and things they should update. There is no committee or jurisdiction other than just dumping another thing into Legislative; he is wondering if it is a long-term process and he thinks it would be – how would they approach that and would they have a separate committee or would they try to form a special committee with the administration and there are a lot of things that could be looked at in model codes. He knows American Legal Publishing offers some things with that, but it is going to take a while to get through that if they decide to do that. The other part he wanted to speak about is that they have had some very long meetings and they are trying to jam in committee meetings that sometimes have very active agendas along with council meetings and he is wondering if they would be better served to add a third day to their months that they dedicate to committees to split them up some more.

G. Drew said four and a half years ago there was a committee formed by the prior Administration to go over the zoning issues and he believes they hired a company. He sat on that committee for a few meetings as the council representative and then it just stopped. He asked the Administration to look through their records. Mayor Owens said he just looked at that today, he is right. They engaged this company to provide some sort of report, and the company never did and then charged the Administration for a report they never produced and went silent. G. Drew asked if the city paid them. Mayor Owens answered no.

C. Howard said he would add some background to that issue. They did RFQs and CT was selected and they started the procedure and then there was a lack of communication, so it got to the point where the Administration fired them more or less because they did not produce in the schedule they proposed.

G. Drew said maybe they mimic that and do something similar and let the administration form the committee and maybe have one or two members of council be selected to represent. H. Taft said that is an option, he thinks it would take the Engineer, the Service Director, the Building Department and others to be involved so that probably makes sense. G. Drew said they had good discussions back then and it just kind of ended. They met a couple of months and then it ended

and there wasn't another meeting scheduled and he was waiting for a final report, and it never showed up.

H. Taft asked the members of council their feelings on additional meetings to try not to jam everything into two meetings.

J. Gabriel said when he first started, they would have Streets, Buildings & Grounds on one Monday with Health & Safety and put the Utilities on another Monday and then Council Meetings in between and they met every Monday. From his perspective, they were shorter meetings because you weren't trying to accomplish so much in a condensed time period. He is not necessarily advocating to go back to that, but he would appreciate it if they could meet more often because he is not a fan of mega meetings.

H. Taft said he noticed on the original schedule he received they had a meeting set for July 13th and on the schedule, he just received that meeting was moved to the 6th. His first comment is that if things were going to be moved, they would get immediate notice of that because he was making some plans that he has to change at this point. If it is correct and they are meeting July 6th they might have July 13th open for some committees as a suggestion. G. Drew said with summer upon them, there are going to be a lot of them missing meetings throughout the next few months; he will be on vacation on July 6th and will not be here.

J. Lucas said they have deadlines to meet with regards to the Charter review so they should look at the calendar now. He asked the Law Directors how much time they will need to draft the Ordinances if they were presented as they are right now. T. Pecora answered it shouldn't take long at all, a couple of days. H. Taft asked if it would only require one Ordinance. J. Lucas said he thought they would treat them as separate Ordinances. T. Pecora said it was his understanding that it had been on one Ordinance in the past. M. Wood responded that previously they were all on one Ordinance but that is when Council was told they had to send it to the ballot regardless so she would think if they had the option to send one to the ballot or not, they should be separate Ordinances to be voted on individually. A. Bonawit said with the upcoming Charter amendment work session coming up, would it be better if they had this handled then took a look after that about extending times as far as another Monday for committees because this Charter thing seems to be big.

G. Howell asked regarding zoning if there was a blanket policy that other cities our size or charter cities have used that they could take a look at and cherry pick from or do they have to hire a company to come in and restructure the whole thing. C. Howard said he thinks they would want a consultant to go through it; they do it for other communities so it would make sense for them to go through and offer recommendations for council's decision. G. Howell said if Avon or Amherst have updated theirs in the last 10 years, it would make sense to take a look and see what they are doing compared to what we have been doing since the 1950s.

Mayor Owens said he doesn't know exactly what work was done by the previous consulting company that they hired, all he saw today was a two-page document recapping everything but not much more than that. He doesn't know what other work was done that they may have in possession. Again, that was four or five years ago and he doesn't know whatever work they did back then is relevant today but he thinks it would be worthwhile to check the records and see what they actually have in their possession because it might give them some deadlines on how they move forward or not and certainly they don't want to duplicate effort. He will take a look first thing tomorrow morning. G. Drew said he would check his emails and anything he received related to that he will forward to Mayor Owens. He knows the outside vendor was never at a meeting.

G. Howell asked if they did the RFQs for the outside vendor, was the money earmarked out of the budget at that time and still sitting in limbo. Would they be ahead of the game to rebid it like they are talking about with an RFQ and then they wouldn't have to come up with the money, or do they have to reallocate it? C. Angney answered it would have been appropriated if they entered into an agreement, they would have encumbered it but once the agreement was terminated it would have cancelled the encumbrance.

H. Taft said as to model codes, he thinks American Legal Publishing offers at least two model codes from what he has read so far. He would agree they would probably need a consultant, there are so many ways to approach zoning anymore and there are completely new ideas about form related zoning and other things and as long as they are going to look at it, they don't want to do a band aid job, he thinks they would want to do a deeper dive.

J. Lucas asked if they would like to explore July 13th as an additional date. The members of council agreed to add a meeting on that date.

TOPIC TWO: City Council Charter Amendment Discussion

G. Drew said Councilman Taft was not here last meeting and it was brought to their attention that he may have some additional ideas or amendments that he may want to add so they wanted to give him some time to let them know about those and talk about it and then they will discuss what the Charter Review brought to the table on June 24th.

H. Taft thanked them for the courtesy and said he doesn't have any other changes other than what they (Charter Review Committee) have come up with as they have come up with it. He has two major concerns. One was that they get rid of current Article XI, Section 11 for what was then Lorain County Rural Water but is now Northern Ohio Rural Water and that they have some means of removing boards and commissions members for misconduct because there is no provision in the Charter for it and they ended up addressing both those issues in some way. Their original drafting he has seen, and he is not sure if Council has had this but Mr. McCourt who is here was a member of that and he found a couple of concerns and redrafted the part about Article 11 and does include that it is explicitly repealing something and making changes. He doesn't have any new quote-on-quote things. He does have a couple areas of concern, but he wants to hear from the Charter Review Commission. He hasn't had time unfortunately to talk to the Law Director, but he thinks some redrafting might make it a little more eloquent. He did see one comment from the last meeting regarding due process and there was a suggestion on removals that they refer to state law, and he really hates referring to state law in their charter before they refer to their own city council and their own Ordinances. If they have the power to do things themselves, he thinks they should internally and, in their Charter, retain that authority. He thinks there is some drafting they have to do and the only other substantive concern he has that is somewhat significant that the state legislature in their infinite wisdom decided you had to have 35% of the electorate instead of 10% of the electorate to have a referendum which is virtually impossible in 30 days to accomplish and he thinks that is exactly what they intended. The Charter Commission has come up with a provision that would restore a more reasonable thing, and they used 10% of the vote for governor or 20% of the vote for Mayor. He thinks they should reduce that in part for initiative and referendum. Especially for initiative, if you are giving people an incentive to instead do an initiative for a Charter amendment that is much less changeful over time because you can do that with 10% of the vote for Mayor so it is fewer signers. He thinks they might want to match that at least in the initiative portion but that is a technical issue they can get into on the 24th.

G. Drew said he wants to bring up one thing and it goes back to the legislation that he drafted about the restrictions on spending and bidding and all of that. He thinks they all had the

opportunity to look at a contract that was signed in everyone's email. He asked if this council wants to entertain drafting some sort of Charter amendment that would allow Council to place restrictions on what a (not the) administration can spend without Council's approval. If the majority of them are ok with how things are, then they will leave it alone, but he still has some concerns and he thinks there are valid reasons why this Council or a Council should have a say in what the administration spends without their knowledge.

H. Taft said he doesn't know on that particular contract, they signed a three-year contract for over \$100,000 how that slides through any limits at all. He doesn't get it and he thinks the contract is illegal personally. He doesn't have an issue with drawing something up in the Charter, but he is a little concerned about doing it this time when they have so many things going and he is also concerned that they are trying to get too finite and too restrictive. He doesn't know if they have enough time to gnash through everything but if they don't this time, he thinks they should look at it at some point.

G. Howell said currently what they have has worked. The problem is the transparency they have had in the past. He thinks if they start strangle holding the administration it makes things tough for them to do business. He thinks on a handshake deal and trusting our Administration and the Council to be informed of all those things is the proper way to do it, leaving them the ability for them to make business as they do now. However, putting a provision in for something like this that just happened with this contract were to come up, he isn't sure how they would do it and that would be a Law Director question but if they sneak a \$100,000 in under their nose like that then the Administration could be up for expulsion or something. He thinks being transparent and letting all of Council know and the taxpayers know about what is going on with the money all the time is the most paramount thing.

J. Gabriel said there are restrictions in place already and from time to time they have already been ignored. So here they are discussing what they should do, to put a rule in place because there are rules in place that they are not paying attention to. He thinks there are already restrictions available and the issue at hand they will have to discuss at a later time because this is a Charter review discussion. From his perspective, the rules have already been violated potentially. As far as the Charter goes, he doesn't know if they need to hardwire that in the Charter because the restrictions are already available.

G. Drew said it would just reduce what the state allows. Back to Councilman Taft's statement earlier, he would hate to refer to the state when they have home rule and that is exactly what they did in that section of the Charter is they kicked it off and said whatever the state does is how they are going to operate and the state made provisions that currently as we sit here today, they don't have to bid for an item if it is almost \$80,000 and next year it is going to be up another 3% and the years after. That may work for the City of Columbus or the City of Cleveland, but they are nowhere comparable to those entities. Again, he doesn't want this to be turned into Council against the Administration, that was never his intention so if they are comfortable tackling the Charter amendment issues now and they can see how things go and look at it down the road and entertain it for next year.

G. Howell said to his point in not being comparable to Columbus and those dollar amounts, he agrees with him. For a city our size and when you have a local contractor who says they have to do it for a certain amount because they live in town and can get there every day and then they bypass that by having to go out for bid, then it ends up costing the city more money in the long run at times.

Alec Bonawit said he thinks it is their responsibility as Council to keep their finger on the Administration and make sure they are being transparent and everything is up front. As soon as

that doesn't happen, then they put the hammer down and they need different legislation. Maybe they are looking down the road more than four years but, he will agree with Councilman Howell at this point they need to attack the Charter amendments and these other issues and keep their eyes open on this situation in making sure everything stays transparent which he sure hopes it will.

H. Taft said his biggest concern is in multi-year contracts that are not disclosed to them. His concern is they have contracts that the next Council and the next Administration are the ones having to suffer for what was done without full disclosure before and that is something they should prohibit along the way.

Mayor Owens said he appreciates everything being talked about and considered and he knows it is done in good spirit, not mean spirited. The fact that they are talking about these contracts is because he made them available to them. As far as transparency is concerned, he would hope that would certainly exhibit this Administration's commitment to transparency as it has been that way since day one. As far as transparency is concerned, he understands that they may have concerns with future Administrations but as far as this Administration is concerned, he wants to go on record and say that is exactly what they have done and they will continue to act in that manner every single day. As far as Homer's concern regarding multi-year contracts – he has been doing all kinds of different type of contract negotiations for 50 years. He is not an attorney however, those negotiations have been with the Cina government, and with the largest corporations in America and he will tell them that the term of a contract is not necessarily nor should it be a particular concern. Normally, if you have an extended contract, it is because you are getting something of value in return. You are either getting extended services, or a lower price or whatever it might be but that is the reason for an extended term. The key to contract is not the term, it is the termination clauses and how they work and how you can get out of an extended agreement. That is the key, are there penalties, what do the penalties include? It is more than just simply a period of time for an extended contract. There are other things as Homer knows and they have discussed this. He wants to be clear to everybody that the contracts that have been entered into and some of them actually agreed to by this body, not this Council but by this body over the past five years are not good contracts and they have been aware of and have approved some of these what he considers to be not very good contracts. The city's attorneys are looking at each and every contract that he has had them look at that the previous Administration has entered into and they will report on those under executive session when they are ready to report on them. He can tell them that they intend to tend to Mr. Drew's concerns and rightfully stated the Finance Director and himself will be reporting on expenditures made under the discretionary clause that they currently have on a monthly basis so that this Council is aware of every expenditure that they will take under the discretionary no bid scenario whether it is over \$50,000 or under \$50,000 it doesn't make any difference because you need to know that this Administration is addressing concerns about infrastructure that previous Administrations didn't address. All of those things will be made transparent and will be reported to them by committee, by special meeting, by the Finance Director and himself and they are committed to doing that because they are entitled to know what they are doing and the citizens are entitled to know what they are spending money on and what they are not spending money on which is also important. That is his commitment to this Council, and they will continue to be the most transparent that they can possibly be. If they are not transparent, it is not by commission, he can tell them that.

G. Drew asked if the Administration would commit to any contract regardless of whether it is dollar or other contractual issues that any contracts the Administration enters into and signs, would they have a problem forwarding them to the Council Clerk so Council can be aware of each contract that takes place. Mayor Owens answered he doesn't know why not, he will check with the Law Directors, there may be things he might not be able to but outside of that, they have his commitment to do that. G. Drew said he would think any contract that is entered into and signed

would then be public record so he would ask that Council get a copy of each contract. Mayor Owens said again, let them give him a proper answer because there may be certain situations, rather than making a blanket statement he will tell them they will certainly do it unless they can't.

J. Lucas said he is going back to what Councilman Taft said about giving time to the Charter amendment discussion on the 24th and he is not exactly sure the number but there are about 12 items and if you put that into time bites and give them 15 minutes each, he thinks they are aware that will be a long time and with that being said he thinks they need to think before the next meeting how they are going to approach each one so that each one gets the due diligence it deserves and the time it deserves because he thinks each one as he goes through them need talked through. Something to think about is how much they can bite off next week and then they have July 6th and then July 13th and then they have to start making some decisions. At what point do they have the committee present some of their opinions which he thought they were going to do as well. H. Taft said he thought that was going to be on the 24th. J. Lucas said that will take time as well and there are 12 of them and if you multiply that by 15 minutes, which is not a lot of time to have an open discussion and debate. How are they going to tackle it? Can they cut it in half and do half one meeting and half the next. H. Taft said first of all, while they have all members of the Charter Review Commission, they should probably hear their side of the story for their 12 things first and then question through what they can. When they are laying on the floor exhausted, they will have to come back another day and hopefully the Charter Review Commission can come back if there are questions to be answered. He thinks for example there are three different things about removal and they are not dissimilar they might be able to bunch those together. There are three things about regionalization which are not dissimilar and maybe they can put those together in dividing them all up. He agrees that it will take about three meetings.

M. Wood asked if Council would like the July 13th meeting to be a regular meeting or a work session. Upon additional discussion, it was agreed that it would be a work session.

Karen Viterna of 4360 Edgewater Drive said she does agree that a number of them are on similar topics and wording that they came up with was very similar so therefore she thinks they can get through it and questions be answered especially if they have everything ahead of time.

Bill McCourt of 4135 Menlo Park said each of the members of the commission provided bullet points of the amendments that are going to be presented and in combination with the fact that they are going to have all the amendment language in front of them, he thinks the emphasis will help to shorten it more. G. Drew asked if Council could be provided with the bullet points ahead of time. B. McCourt said he didn't see why not. G. Drew said it would be helpful.

H. Taft said he has come up with the old language to go with the new language to go with each one and he shared the preliminary with Melanie but he is trying to go through and underline more of where some of the changes are so it is easier for everyone to read and he will try to complete it within the next couple of days.

G. Drew adjourned the meeting upon no further discussion.

Next Legislative Meeting: July 20, 2026 – 6:00 p.m. @ Vermilion Municipal Complex, 687 Decatur Street, Vermilion, Ohio.

Transcribed by Melanie Wood, Clerk of Council (June 17, 2026)