

**ASHLAND CITY COUNCIL
STUDY SESSION MINUTES
Monday, November 3, 2025**

Mayor Graham called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m.

Council Present: Mayor Graham, Councilors Bloom, Dahle, DuQuenne, Hansen, Kaplan, and Sherrell.

Council Absent: none

Staff Present:

Sabrina Cotta	City Manager
Alissa Kolodzinski	City Recorder
Tom McBartlett	Director of Electric

I. Call to Order

II. Reports and Presentations

a. Electric Rate Presentation and Proposal

Councilor Bloom immediately raised a procedural concern regarding the electric rate presentation, emphasizing the importance of enabling both the Council and the public to engage with the materials fully. Concern was expressed that the Council had to discuss a complex issue affecting ratepayers without adequate preparation time, as the draft cost of service study was not included in the meeting packet. *Motion made to postpone the presentation and discussion until such a time as council and the public have received the full cost of service study in advance by either the next study session or a special meeting if deemed necessary.*

During discussion, some councilors emphasized that the matter's importance warranted thorough preparation. Questions were raised regarding which materials had already been shared and if Council would have additional opportunity to review the information and provide feedback before the report's completion. Staff explained that purpose of this study session was to present findings, gather initial feedback, and incorporate that input into a draft report for future Council consideration. Those opposing postponement expressed that it would be beneficial to proceed as planned, viewing the consultants' presentation as an opportunity for engagement and guidance. This approach would allow the consultants to prepare an initial draft report informed by preliminary feedback, with flexibility for future review sessions. Support for postponement was also expressed, emphasizing the importance of including complete presentation materials in the Council packet to ensure transparency.

Cotta clarified the definition of a study session as outlined in the AMC, stating study session are for Council members to receive background information and ask questions about matters to be subsequently voted on. Council members expressed concern about providing input without prior review of the complex materials. It was noted that limited time for analysis could affect the ability to offer substantive feedback. Questions were raised regarding how the process would continue if no comments were provided at this meeting.

The rate consultant, Mark Beauchamp (via Zoom), explained that the presentation was intended to familiarize Council with the process, financial targets, and recommendations; and clarified he could return for another meeting if needed and he was not expecting immediate feedback.

The resulting votes on the motion were Bloom, Dahle, DuQuenne, and Sherrell, Aye, Kaplan and Hansen, Nay. Following the vote, Council discussed the need for consistency in how materials are provided for meetings.

b. Ballot Measure Question: Should Ashland's Charter be Amended to Require Voters Involvement and Approval for City of Ashland Utility Bill Fee or Tax?'

DuQuenne introduced the ballot measure discussion, clarifying that the issue concerned additional taxes and fees on utilities, not the actual utility rates themselves. Councilors reflected on the recent fee increases and whether voters should have the opportunity to vote on such fees before utility bills are impacted. The difference between taxes and fees on utility bills were clarified in that only fees can be added to utility bills and are set by the Council. It was emphasized that the discussion was specifically for the parks fee, wildfire protection fee, and public safety fee not utility rates or taxes, which already require voter approval.

Councilors discussed concerns about previously circulated misinformation and the potential impact such information could have if the measure were presented to voters. Discussion included balancing the Council's responsibility, as elected representatives, to make informed decisions following thorough analysis with the importance of maintaining public trust by involving voters in the decision-making process. Additional concerns were expressed regarding the precedent this decision could set for future councils and whether the proposed ballot language clearly communicated its implications for inflation adjustments to fees or other charges, such as the street user fee.

An alternative process was suggested of creating an ordinance that would establish a rigorous public engagement process for any new fees or above-inflation increases which could include notices to all households, dedicated public hearings, online surveys, and a minimum timeframe for consideration. It was also discussed whether residents struggling financially engage with surveys or city communications due to time constraints.

The Council conducted a straw poll on whether to put the proponent's initiative on the ballot:

- Councilors DuQuenne, Bloom and Sherrell: Yes
- Councilors Dahle, Hansen and Kaplan: No
- Mayor Graham: No

With a 3-4 result, the Council directed staff not to put the petition forward.

Graham proposed working on an ordinance to establish procedures for fee changes with several councilors expressing interest in addressing this issue after the December retreat where they would be focusing on budget forecasting and financial planning.

III. Adjournment of Study Session

The meeting was adjourned at 6:42 p.m.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Alissa Kolodzinski', written over a horizontal line.

City Recorder Alissa Kolodzinski

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tonya Graham', written over a horizontal line.

Mayor Tonya Graham