

Affordable Housing Commission Minutes

Tuesday, October 21st, 2025 at Noon
City Administration Building – Council Chambers

In attendance: Mollie Fitzgerald, Meghan Jennings, Shay Myers, Mary Abel, Solveig Spjeldnes, Zack Dye, Maria Modayil, Polly Sumney, Amy Lipka

Absent: None

1. Introduction – Mission and Purpose - Solveig welcomed everyone and stated the Commission’s mission: The Athens City Affordable Housing Commission is a commission of city government established to review best practices, investigate community affordable housing models, and identify needs and opportunities within Athens’ city limits to advance decent, safe, sustainable affordable housing for all city residents. The commission is tasked with providing advice and guidance on measures and policies that influence access to and needs within the local housing market.

She emphasized the AHC looks at housing developments on all points of the housing spectrum – not just low-income housing. We want to be inclusive.

1. Establish Quorum – Quorum met.
2. Disposition of Minutes – Meghan moved to approve the September minutes. Polly seconded. All in favor and the motion carried.
3. City Updates – Meghan Jennings (City Planner), Solveig (City Council) and Shay Myers (Board of Zoning Appeals) – Megan recapped the rezoning discussion from 10/20 council meeting on Columbus Road. In the spring the city was trying to determine what to do with the former fire station. Potential users were not meeting the current zoning (R1/R3). The building would be better suited for a commercial facility. This led to a larger review of this corridor and resulted in proposed rezoning of the north and west side “hub” areas. There was a June public meeting at OVMOD about this with great attendance. There was a second meeting with residents and the city shared why rezoning was being considered. The proposed rezoning map is currently before council The biggest changes is the B1 change (center of map) and increasing residential density to the west of Columbus road to better buffer single family homes on 3rd street and Sunset. The former Dairy Queen will continue to be B1 which does not allow drive throughs. There will be additional conversations about the south side of Lancaster/Columbia for higher density residential. This was

scaled back to R2. Code prohibits improvements past a certain value point so existing apartments that are not in the best shape are currently limited on how much can be invested. Polly Sumney asked for an overlay of current and proposed zoning. Meghan clarified the changes on the map.

There are no updates on the Welcome Home Ohio program, but the city continues to negotiate purchase of a parcel at the end of Hudson that would house some of the 8 units. Due to floodplain concerns, they need dirt to raise the area. There is a lot of land clearing happening along Kenny Drive and the dirt from that site will be used as future fill for the Hudson Ave homes. This dirt is being “stored” on the old railroad ROW by the Red Cross building. This is in the way of a pedestrian walkway, but it is temporary.

Vacant Building Ordinance – the commission reviewed this and provided the city with feedback. It appears people are supportive of the ordinance. One change was made that omits requirements that a building be listed with a realtor. The owner just needs to be able to show that a marketing plan is in place. Hopefully this will pass by the end of the year.

The Gathering Place rezoning has been contentious. Solveig shared that the council chamber was full of residents on both sides of the issue at the council meeting. Some are concerned with the Conestoga Huts being placed at the Gathering Place. There was a change in the ordinance from a 2-year review to a 1-year review. It appears the ordinance will pass. There is a follow up ordinance that would allow similar developments in other parts of the community if they were supervised by an entity like the Gathering Place.

Polly shared she has received negative feedback. Solveig has heard pros and cons. Shay has received a lot of questions and said it seems it’s a matter of what is actually being discussed (granting GP the right to move forward with Conestoga huts, and a separate ordinance for code change that allows emergency housing). Rob Delach, community member, shared a public hearing to discuss the latter on November 3rd at 7p. Please come! The BZA is a key player in this legislation as well as the Service Safety Director. Rob gave an overview of the process. There are a lot of levels of review and it would require anyone to come to the BZA for a conditional use.

Sunset Shelter Update – Lead abatement is done and bid opening is tomorrow 10/22. It will likely be available for folks to move in the latter part of 2026. It will have 41 beds. Maria asked if the fire station will be opened again for the winter to house people. It is currently in an open bid lease for businesses. If that moves forward, it may not be available.

4. Short Term Rentals, Speaker Rob Delach, Chair of Board of Zoning Appeals – There is an issue with replacing homes for people to live in with short term rentals. We

should have some degree of control over this. When STR ordinances came up in 2020, Chairperson Chris Fahl decided it made sense for language to be incorporated on STR, but it lacked any real regulations. Rob presented the “City of Athens Affordable Housing Commission Short Term Rental Report” which included an overview of the code around STRs, definitions, zone designations, maps of current short term rental permits. *See Attachment A.*

There is concern from members about out-of-state investors buying property in Athens (and other Ohio cities) for STRs. The ordinance requires the property to have a property manager if you live more than 50 miles from Athens/the unit. Contact information would be updated regularly. There was a recent WOUB article about this.

R2/R3 and business zones are susceptible to conversion to STR. There is nothing in code to keep this from happening currently. Hierarchy in code changes should be considered. Meghan shared STRs are not allowed in R2 zone for conditional use. They are in R3. It’s not necessarily an automatic hierarchy where anything permitted in R1 is ok in other zones. She added that STRs in business zones are tricky since they are seen as a business. Is that more appropriate than having them in residential zones? Blick Avenue was a PUD development (not B3 permitted) so that is likely why there were so many conversions to STR on that street. It was PUD because townhomes are not currently permitted in city code – the city is working on changing this though. Solveig mentioned there should be no STR in R1. There have been people who purchased homes thinking they could do STR and then in fact could not. So far BZA reviews are working. The commission briefly discussed cases against the city – both were dropped.

We want to be proactive and strengthen code to prevent problems and upticks in STRs. There are no concrete ideas on how to do that yet. We will revisit this conversation and add the report to the minutes.

12:55p Megan Vogel left meeting.

5. Area Housing Development/Construction projects - Moved to November meeting.
 - a. Ridges:
 - b. LIHTC projects:
 - c. SAOP:
 - d. Woods Edge and other private developments/construction:
6. Committee Reports/Updates – Progress on Projects and Goals
 - a. Nominating Committee (Ad hoc) - *Mary, Megan V., and Amy*: Moved to November meeting.

- b. New Development Committee - *Mary, Megan V, Meghan J, Mollie and Shay*: Moved to November meeting.
 - c. Neighborhood Revitalization - *Maria, Zach, Solveig, Polly, Amy, Megan V.*
 - Rental Inspections Processes Subcommittee:
 - Westside Porchfest and Strengthening Neighborhoods: Rob also gave a brief update on PorchFest. This is now a formal nonprofit registered with the federal government – yay! Saturday, May 16th will be West Side Porchfest. West Side is doing a Pumpkin giveaway too.
 - d. Communication/Education Committee (Ad hoc) – *Polly and Amy*: Moved to November meeting.
7. For the Good of the Order –
- a. Discussion of Meetings Schedule: Moved to November meeting.
 - b. Commission change: Moved to November meeting.
 - c. HUD Changes: Zack Dye gave a brief overview. HUD will cap continuing care funding at 30% and transition funding to transitional short-term models. This has several negative impacts on the community. The Housing Authority is funded through December, but they aren't sure beyond that.
8. Concluding Remarks – None
9. Motion to Adjourn – Maria moved to adjourn at 1:04p.

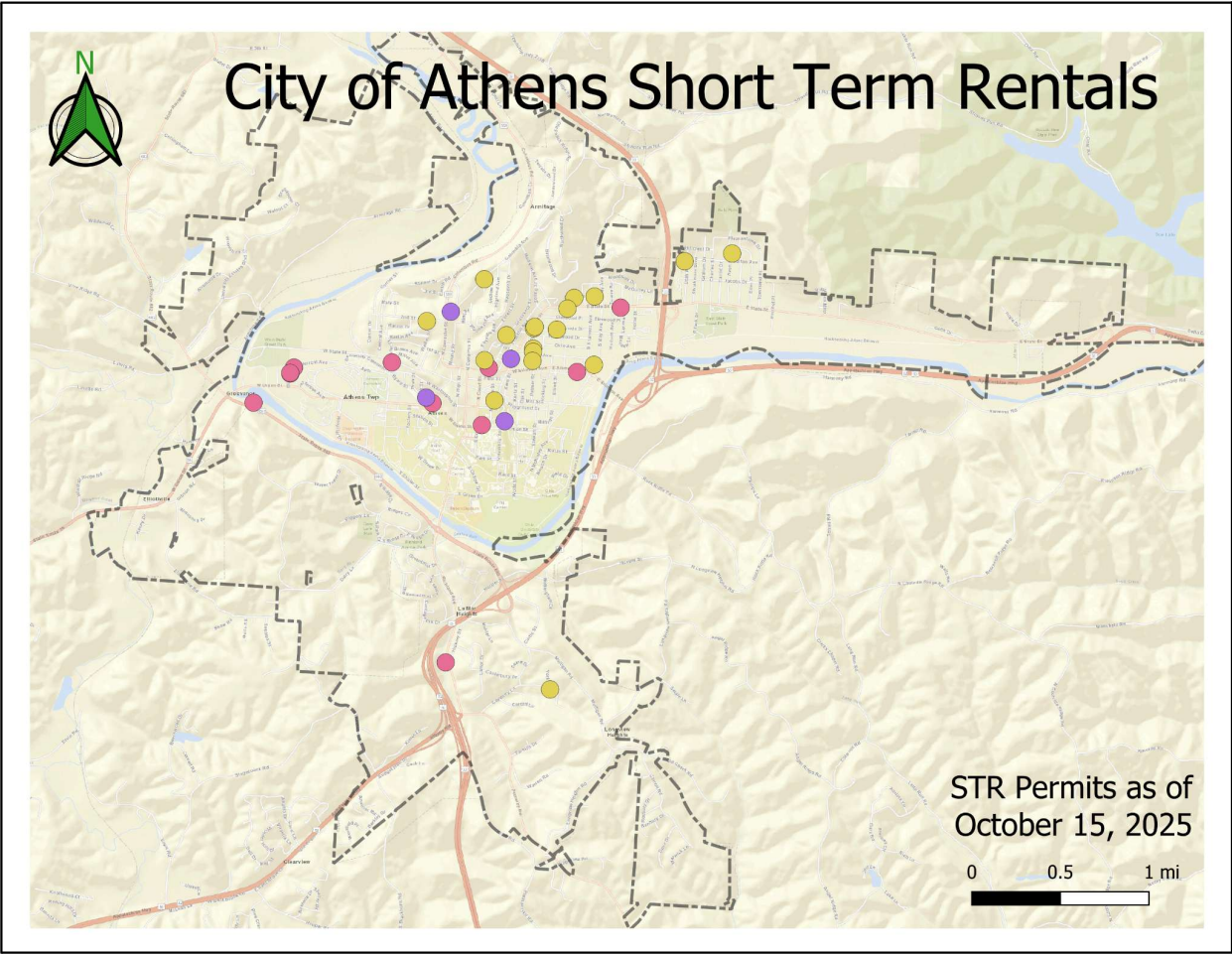
City of Athens Affordable Housing Commission

Short Term Rental Report

"Short term rental." A dwelling unit offered for rent in part, or in its entirety, for less than 30 consecutive days per occupant.

"Bed and breakfast." A dwelling unit with no more than four guest rooms, providing lodging with or without breakfast to paying transient guests, with a maximum stay of no more than 30 days. A short-term rental permit is required.

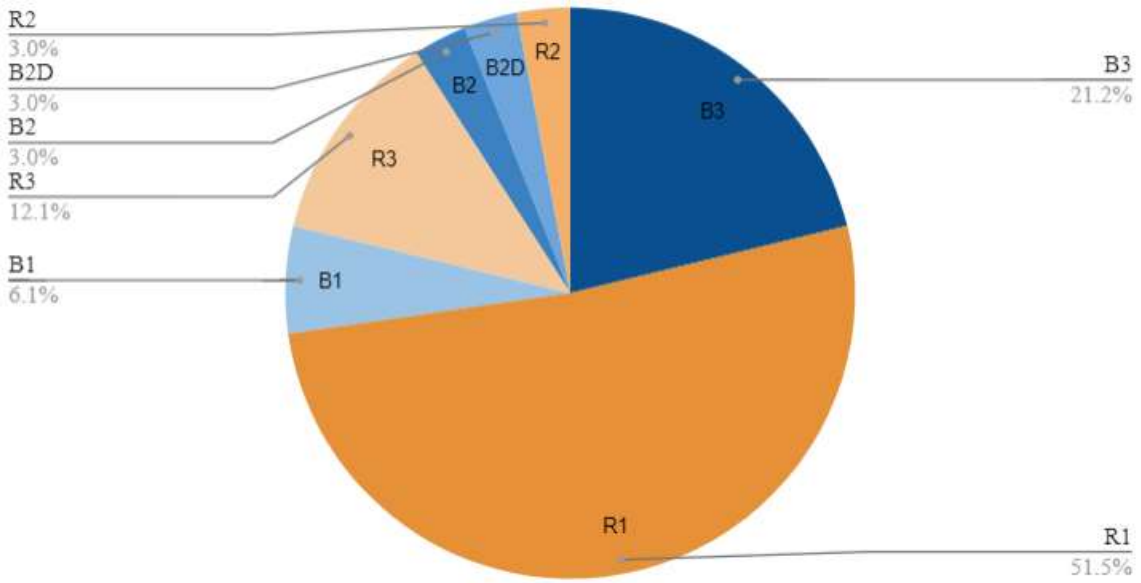
Zoning Categories: R = residential, B = Business, M = Manufacturing, OS = Open Space



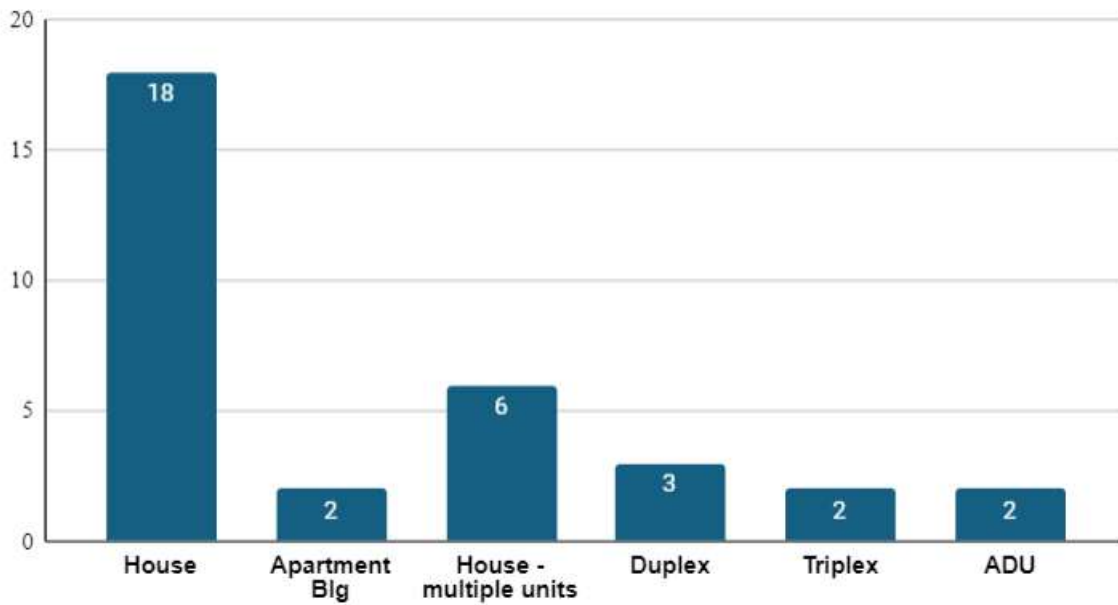
Summary of the current Short-Term Rentals (STRs) that have been permitted

1. **33 STRs permitted in the City of Athens**, as of Oct. 15, 2025
2. ~2/3 in Residential Zones, ~1/3 in Business Zones, just over 1/2 are in R1 zones
3. Of the 24 in Residential Zones, 17 are Owner Occupied in R1, and only 2 of those appear to be accessory units. **Most R1 STRs are rooms for rent in the primary residential structure**
4. There are 5 Owner Non-occupied STRs in R2 and R3 residential zones, for a total of what appears to be 10 STA units.
5. In Business Zones there are 11 whole unit/house STRs totalling ~17 units.
6. In many of these cases, these are not units in an apartment building, but rather **mostly residential houses that are in business zones**. Only 2 of those 11 are in traditional apartment buildings of 4 units or more, which leaves 9 that were likely originally built as single family residences or possibly small multi-unit housing, totalling **~13 units that have been converted from long term rental units in Business Zones**. I believe the zoning code term for this is that they are legally non-conforming residential units in a business zone.

% STR by Zone - total =33



STR Permits by Building Category - total = 33



STRs that have removed housing stock from the market

Long term rentals in houses or owner-occupied residences: 9 in Business Zones with 13 units, and 5 in R2/R3 Zones with 10 units that could be long term rentals. Total: 14

locations with ~23 units. Assuming 3 renters per unit for an estimated 69 rooms that are no longer rented long-term. With over 5,000 rental units in Athens, **69 units = 1.4%, so maybe just a drop in the rental unit bucket.**

Properties that were directly converted from **single-family to STR - 1** (in B-3 Zone)
Properties as **potential single-family residences converted from long-term to STR - 2** (in B-3), 1 possible in B-2

STRs permitted over time

Looking at non-R1 STRs to focus on properties that are more likely conversions from long-term rentals and single family homes, from 2020-2022 - 9 permits were issued. From 2023-2025, there have been only 7 more. **There isn't an accelerating trend in Business Zones and R3/R2 Zones.**



Outside ownership and multiple locations ownership

Of the 33 STRs currently permitted in Athens, **only 2 appear to be held by interests outside Athens County**, a company in Chicago (2 units), and a realtor in Columbus (2 units), both in R3 Zones. My conclusion is that up to now, at least, **outside interests have not been buying up properties and converting them to STRs.**

One local business owner has bought up 4 locations with 4 units total and converted both long term rentals and a single family residence into STRs. These acquisitions have occurred in the past 3 years, with 1 as recently as 2025.

What are the take-away messages?

1. **R1 STRs are all owner-occupied, mostly for rooms to rent in the main residence.** While the BZA has been hearing requests for variances and conditional uses to allow more, none have been approved by the BZA (more on this in the next section). This result is exactly what was intended with the STR regulations that were put in place by City Council in 2020. The intent was to allow property owners to generate revenue from their property while remaining as occupants, potentially to help pay the costs of owning the property while not negatively impacting the housing market. In this respect, **the zoning code is functioning as intended.**
2. In general a very small number of long term rentals and single-family residences have been converted to STRs, somewhere less than 1.4%. **Over time, there has NOT been an acceleration in STR permits issued in Business and R2/R3 Zones.** However, **legally non-conforming residential units in Business Zones are probably at high risk of conversion to STRs.** There appear to be many more that could be converted (an assessment of how many should be done), and as it stands currently, those property **owners can convert any or all of the residential buildings in Business Zones to STRs by right.**
3. Outside interests - multiple location acquisitions. Almost no outside interests have converted long term rentals or single family homes to STRs. The one concerning detail is that a local interest now has 4 locations that it manages as STRs and **could continue to purchase and convert properties in Business and R1/R2 Zones with nothing in code to prevent this.**

Zoning Code Summary

Zoning Hierarchy, from Most Restrictive on left: R1 - R2 - R3 - B1 - B2/B2D - B3
M & OS - no residential allowed, E1 - educational, may include residential

SHORT-TERM RENTALS – NONRESIDENT OWNER SHORT TERM RENTALS – THE KEEPING OF NOT MORE THAN THREE ADULT RENTERS PLUS RELATED CHILDREN BY A NONRESIDENT OWNER FOR PERIODS OF LESS THAN THIRTY (30) DAYS ON R-1 LOTS THAT ABUT AN R-2, R-3, OR ANY B-ZONE OR THAT THE PRINCIPAL HOME FRONTS ON EAST STATE STREET, CARPENTER STREET, LANCASTER STREET, OR COLUMBUS ROAD

Code Office interpretation is that because a conditional use is allowed in some cases in R1 zones, that automatically makes it allowable by right in an R2 and R3 zone, **and subsequently in the Business Zones.**

What is the role of the BZA with STRs?

CODE OF ORDINANCES CITY OF ATHENS, OHIO

Chapter 23.04. - Permitted Uses.

23.04.01. - R-1 Residential Zone (One-Family)

(C)(3) Short-term rentals nonresident owner short term rentals - the keeping of not more than three adult renters plus related children by a nonresident owner for periods of less than 30 days on R-1 lots that abut an R-2, R-3, or any B-zone or that the principal home fronts on East State Street, Carpenter Street, Lancaster Street, or Columbus Road.

23.04.03. - R-3 Residential Zone (Multi-Family)

(A)(4) Owner-occupied or owner-managed "bed and breakfast" establishments.

(A)(5) Tourist home a single family house or duplex dwelling that is rented as a whole house for short term rent with no more than five unrelated guests or one family for no more than 30 consecutive days. A short term rental permit is required.

23.04.06. - B-2D Downtown Business Zone

(B) "Bed and breakfast" establishments.

23.04.05. - B-2 Business District.

(B)(4) "Bed and breakfast" establishments

Chapter 29.03. - Rental Dwelling, Short Term Rental, and Housing Permit

Mention of Short Term Rentals for permitting and other stipulations.