

Athens City Planning Commission

A regular meeting of the Athens City Planning Commission was held in the City Council Chambers, third floor of City Hall, on August 20, 2025, at 12:00 PM

1. Call to Order

Chair John Kotowski called the meeting to order at 12:02 PM and administered the oath to those in the audience intending to speak before the Commission. A quorum was established.

Planning Commission Members

- Chris Knisely-Absent
- John Kotowski, Chair-Present
- Steve Patterson, Mayor-Present
- Andy Stone, Service-Safety Director-Present
- Ally Rapp Lee-Present

Staff Present:

- Lance Allison- Assistant Code Enforcement Director
- Meghan Jennings-City Planner

Mr. Patterson introduced Ms. Rapp Lee as the newest Planning Commissioner, filling the vacancy left by Austin Phillips.

2. Disposition of July 16, 2025, Minutes

Motion: Mr. Stone moved to approve the minutes.

Second: Mr. Patterson seconded.

Vote: Motion passed 3-0.

3. Cases

Case 25-06: Columbus Road / Lancaster Street / Columbia Avenue Neighborhood Hub Rezoning

- **Recusal**
 - Ms. Rapp Lee recused herself from discussion due to property ownership in area.
- **Overview of Past Discussions (Presentation by the City Planner)**

- The proposed rezoning initiative was prompted by the relocation of the former Fire Station Headquarters, and the consideration of potential future uses for the site, ensuring that the zoning aligns with current and anticipated development needs.
- Reviewed existing land uses (mixed residential and commercial) and existing zoning (primarily residential), noting a mismatch.
- Noted rezoning could allow for a small-scale walkable neighborhood commercial hub.
- Public meeting key feedback:
 - Opposition to drive-through at old Dairy Queen site due to traffic.
 - Concerns about traffic congestion on Lancaster Street.
 - Desire for improved pedestrian infrastructure.
 - Support for a neighborhood park and walkable commercial uses.
- Proposed Zoning Map
 - Proposed rezoning map allows for new opportunities while preserving existing residential uses.
 - Zoning buffers to protect single-family homes.
- **Public Input**
 - Requested vote postponement for further discussion about proposed zoning with residents.
 - Concerns about the proposed zoning map and prior statements; requested postponement; submitted petition with 65+ signatures.
 - Requested more engagement; raised questions about lot consolidation and height rules.
 - Expressed traffic concerns and right-of-way inquiries.
 - Concerns about neighborhood impacts, affordable housing, and zoning discrepancies.

Motion: Mr. Patterson motioned to table the rezoning discussion and postpone any vote, with intent to readdress within the current calendar year after gathering additional information and feedback.

Second: Mr. Stone seconded.

Vote: Motion passed 3-0, with Ms. Rapp Lee recusing.

4. Communications

Title 41 Application / 9 Coss Street

- **Overview**

- Project: Performing arts center with 350-seat theater; estimated \$112M cost, 45,000 sq. ft.
 - Shows will be open to the public
 - **Discussion**
 - Height variance concerns (flight tower at 88 ft.).
 - Fire safety, construction access.
-

5. Reports

Code Office

- Expecting the Hugh White Title 41 to return as a case at the next Planning Commission meeting.

City Planning Office

- American StructurePoint consultants returning in early September to present the results of the code audit. As well as present the public input summary report from the February public input meeting.
-

6. Opportunity for Citizens to Speak About Items Not Listed on the Agenda

- **Mr. Branner**, Athens, OH
 - Presented legal research suggesting apartment developments should be reviewed as subdivisions under Ohio law.
 - Requested a meeting to review findings. Emphasized concern about lack of oversight for large apartment projects compared to smaller subdivisions.
- **Todd Acheson**, Athens, OH
 - Spoke on behalf of East First Street Neighborhood Association in cooperation with Friends of the Plains Mounds.

- Expressed concern over two LIHTC apartment projects on East First Street in The Plains.
 - Cited archaeological and cultural significance of the area, potential non-compliance with State Historic Preservation Office survey standards, and lack of public access to survey results.
 - Requested subdivision review for proper oversight.
 - **Board Response** – Acknowledged receipt of materials; will forward to legal counsel for review.
-

7. Announcements & Other Business

- Stimson Avenue bridge one-way through August 25 for university move-in.
 - Armory Open House scheduled for September 30 at 1:30 PM.
 - Next Meeting – September 3, 2025
-

8. Adjournment

- Meeting adjourned at 1:17 PM