

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 September 3, 2025, at 12:00 PM

1. Call to Order

Chair John Kotowski called the meeting to order at 12:01 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

Ms. Rapp Lee was officially sworn in as the fifth member of the commission.

2. Disposition of August 20, 2025, Minutes

Motion: Mr. Patterson moved to approve the minutes.

Second: Mr. Stone seconded.

Vote: Motion passed 4-0 with Ms. Knisely abstaining.

3. Cases

No cases presented.

4. Communications

Overlay Zone Public Engagement Report

Presentation:

David of American Structurepoint presented on the Neighborhood Corridor Overlay Zone, noting it builds on the Stimson Avenue Corridor Plan (completed 18 months ago with federal

Opportunity Zone funding) which recommended a corridor overlay to guide improvements along Stimson Avenue and West Carpenter Street.

Public Engagement:

- Ten stakeholder sessions with business owners, staff, and community leaders.
- Public open house at the fire hall.
- Community survey with 424 responses.

Key Findings:

- Support for small businesses and pedestrian-focused development.
- Emphasis on sidewalks, green space, and multimodal transport.
- Mixed views on parking: some want reduced requirements, others fear spillover.
- Calls for clearer zoning and affordable housing.

Overlay Zone Characteristics:

- Keeps existing zoning uses but adds standards.
- Potential elements: reduced parking, setbacks, pedestrian-friendly design, and support for small-scale mixed use.

Discussion:

- Balancing small business needs with new standards.
- Parking impacts, possible parking structure, and better signage.
- Floodplain mitigation by directing density to safer areas.
- Supporting local businesses through walkability, signage, and cohesive design.

Conclusion:

Presentation materials, survey data, and reports will be posted on the City’s website for public review.

Code Audit Review

Presentation:

David of American Structurepoint also presented findings from a comprehensive code audit:

- Athens’ land development code is fragmented across numerous titles, creating conflicts and inconsistencies.
- Recommendation to consolidate into a Unified Development Ordinance (UDO) for clarity and efficiency.
- Tools such as annotated outlines, land use tables, and graphics would improve usability and reduce staff burden.

Federal Legal Issues Identified:

- RLUIPA requires equal treatment of religious and non-religious assemblies.

- Sign codes must be content-neutral under *Reed v. Gilbert*.
- Federal housing law requires clear definitions for residential health care facilities.

Discussion:

- Members raised questions on compliance and possible next steps.
- Consultant noted the audit is complete; future work would depend on funding.
- A presentation to City Council may be considered.
- Staff and members agreed further review and digestion of the audit findings will be needed before determining specific actions.

5. Reports

No reports presented.

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

Mr. Acheson, Grim Road, Athens, speaking on behalf of himself and Mr. Branner, urged that the Cornerstone, Lofts, and Plains Live Tech projects in The Plains be reviewed under Athens' subdivision regulations, citing time-sensitive approvals, limited public input, and pending studies before potential OHFA approval and construction.

7. Announcements & Other Business

Mr. Stone mentioned the steps needed to obtain a legal opinion from the Law Director regarding two proposed developments in The Plains, Ohio.

- Residents had submitted a legal review at the previous meeting, and Mr. Riggs noted the matter may not fall under subdivision or other regulations.
- The Commission must first receive additional information from City staff (Code Office) before requesting the opinion.
- Once the remaining information is received, the Commission will submit a formal request to the Law Director concerning the three-mile radius and proposed projects.

8. Adjournment

- Meeting adjourned at 1:33 PM