

# 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 December 17, 2025, at 12:00 PM

## 1. Call to Order

Chair John Kotowski called the meeting to order at 12:00 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-Present
- John Kotowski, Chair-Present
- Steve Patterson, Mayor-Absent
- Andy Stone, Service-Safety Director-Present
- Ally Rapp Lee-Present

### Staff Present:

- Lance Allison- Assistant Code Enforcement Director
  - Meghan Jenning-City Planner
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## 2. Consideration and approval of the minutes from the October 1, 2025, meeting.

**Motion:** Ms. Rapp Lee moved to approve the minutes.

**Second:** Mr. Stone seconded.

**Vote:** Motion passed 4-0, with one abstention.

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## 3. Cases

### Case 25-08 / Neighborhood Corridor Overlay Zone (NCOZ) – Proposed Language

#### Overview:

- Proposal concerns the adoption of a neighborhood corridor overlay zone.
- Commission may vote today or defer.
- City Planner Ms. Jennings and Mr. Baird (American Structure Point) presented the proposed language and process, including prior community meetings.

## **Project Overview:**

- Reviewed city code and planning documents; gathered public input via open houses, stakeholder sessions, and surveys.
- Feedback categorized and incorporated into the draft ordinance.

## **Draft Ordinance Details:**

- Uses: Mixed-use is encouraged. Prohibited uses include first-floor residential in multi-floor buildings, drive-throughs, auto-oriented, industrial, and self-storage uses.
- Buildings: Must face the street with pedestrian-oriented entrances; long blank walls are prohibited.
- Parking:
  - Existing buildings are exempt from new off-street parking requirements.
  - New buildings receive a 50% parking reduction, with up to 50% additional reduction for proximity to and upgrades of bus stops.
  - Parking must be located behind buildings.
  - Bicycle parking is required and highly visible.
- Sidewalks & Streetscape: Sidewalks required along all frontages (8 ft minimum, ADA compliant); street trees encouraged.
- Signage & Lighting: Projecting signs encouraged; new pole signs prohibited; pedestrian-scale lighting required.
- Façades: High ground-floor transparency (60%), required windows, and entrance features (canopies, porches, or recesses).
- Outdoor Dining: Allowed for food and drink businesses, including in the right-of-way when permitted.
- Open Space: Buildings over 10,000 sq. ft. must provide 10% open space with public amenities.

## **Commission Questions and Presenters Responses**

- Prohibited-use language and artisan activities:
  - Mayor Patterson asked if artisan uses (welding, jewelry-making, glasswork) could be unintentionally excluded.
  - Ms. Jennings explained the list was based on heavy industrial zoning; Mr. Baird agreed clarifications and possible scale-based criteria (e.g., maximum square footage) are needed.
- Overlay zone application:
  - Ms. Knisely asked if adopting the overlay text automatically applies it citywide.
  - Ms. Jennings & Mr. Baird clarified adoption sets the framework only; separate map amendments are required. Language on future overlays was removed as redundant.
- Building orientation:

- Mr. Kotowski asked about entrances facing pocket parks or public open spaces.
- Mr. Baird & Ms. Jennings stated street-facing entrances are required; public open space entrances are acceptable, private open spaces may pose access concerns.
- Tree requirements:
  - Mr. Kotowski asked whether Shade Tree Commission rules still apply for required tree plantings.
- Balconies, canopies, and projections:
  - Mr. Kotowski asked if balconies could be added without Board of Zoning Appeals approval.
  - New buildings must provide one entrance treatment (recess, canopy, or porch). Mr. Stone suggested allowing compliant projections without special approval, similar to signs.
- First-floor residential prohibition:
  - Intent is to avoid inactive frontage and encourage commercial activity. Mr. Stone highlighted potential challenges in applying this in residential districts, and Mr. Baird recommended further review.
- Parking:
  - Existing buildings: no new parking required.
  - New construction: 50% reduction in off-street parking, additional reductions near bus stops or shelters.
  - Off-site parking permitted; on-site parking must be at rear.
  - Discussion included public parking, overflow, and counting public lots toward requirements.
- Projecting signage:
  - One projecting sign permitted under current code; right-of-way projections possible with approval. Exemptions under overlay standards were considered.
- Sidewalks:
  - Concern about requiring 8-foot sidewalks in constrained or residential areas; Ms. Jennings and Mr. Baird acknowledged need for flexibility.

### **Public Comment**

- Rob Delach, 124 Morris Avenue:
  - Strong support for overlay zone.
  - Endorsed reduced parking requirements; acceptable minor overflow into neighborhoods.
  - Suggested improving public awareness of existing parking options.

### **Commission Discussion**

- Topics included balancing residential protection with economic development, avoiding nonconforming uses, parking for upper-story residential units, and transportation alternatives (GO Bus expansion).
- Staff noted 24-hour parking enforcement helps reduce long-term storage parking.

#### **Action and Next Steps**

- No vote taken; further revisions required.
  - Staff to prepare a redlined draft addressing:
    - Artisan uses
    - Definitions
    - Residential provisions
    - Parking
    - Right-of-way standards
  - Revised draft expected for January 21 Planning Commission meeting.
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#### **4. Communications**

Mr. Stone provided an update on the Hugh White Honda Title 41 application, previously approved with the condition of annexation. He noted that Theater Lane is technically a township road serving city properties, and annexing it would be complex due to its location within the ODOT limited-access right-of-way. To resolve this, the city and township have agreed that the city will assume maintenance of Theater Lane without annexation. The agreement will be presented to Council for approval after the first of the year, and if approved, the lane will be treated as a city street, allowing the annexation to proceed.

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#### **5. Reports**

##### **Meghan Jennings-City Planner**

Nothing to report.

##### **Lance Allison-Assistant Code Enforcement Director**

Nothing to report.

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

No additional comments were offered on items not listed on the agenda.

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## **7. Announcements & Other Business**

No announcements or other business.

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## **8. Adjournment**

**Motion:** Ms. Knisely motioned to adjourn meeting.

**Second:** Mr. Stone seconded.

**Motion:** Motion passed unanimously.