

# Affordable Housing Commission Minutes

January 20, 2026 at Noon  
City Administration Building – Council Chambers

**In attendance:** Meghan Jennings, Mary Abel, Amy Lipka, Maria Modayil, Megan Vogel, Mollie Fitzgerald, Polly Sumney, Alan Swank (appointed by City Council)

**Absent:** Shay Myers, Zack Dye

**Guest:** Solveig Spjeldnes

**Link to YouTube recording of meeting:** [www.youtube.com/watch?v=WECZBKIEiUU](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WECZBKIEiUU)

1. **Introduction** – Mollie (presiding the meeting in place of Chair Shay Myers) started the first meeting of 2026 at 12:02 p.m. and read the AHC mission. To note, this meeting was recorded for later publishing (and not live-streamed) due to an internet outage at the City building.
2. **Establish Quorum** – Quorum met.
3. **Disposition of Minutes** – Mary Abel moved to approve the minutes. Amy Lipka seconded. All in favor and the motion passed.
4. **Amendment to the Agenda** – Proposal to move the Nominating Committee report as the first item on the agenda to vote on the new commission member. All in favor.
5. **Committee Reports**

## **Nominating committee:**

Amy introduced the nomination for the vacant seat on the Commission. The committee received five letters of interest, and recommended Solveig to fill the vacancy given her knowledge and experience on the Commission. Amy proposed the motion, Mary seconded. All in favor.

Solveig reminded the Commission that this position will need to be approved by the City Council. Alan Swank proposed that he bring this to the City Council by amending the agenda for the City Council meeting (happening tonight, Jan. 20). Alan, as Chair of the Planning & Development Committee, will present this nomination under the Planning & Development reports. Alan as the City Council representative will be able to provide updates to the City Council as is appropriate. Additionally, the Affordable Housing Commission reports annually to the City Council.

6. **City Update – Meghan Jennings, City Planning & Alan Swank, City Council**
  - LITHC project: No updates, moving forward as reviewed and discussed. This includes The Plains, Hooper street, and Blackburn Landing.
  - Welcome Home Ohio: Hudson Ave project moving ahead. Site development plans are in progress, demolition timing is being considered.

- Neighborhood corridor overlay zone: Updated draft is being considered by the Planning Commission at the meeting on January 21, 2026. Legal language is being examined with the existing code.
- Ridges and 317 Board:
  - 317 Board is receiving land from the Ridges Development Project and will be constructing supportive housing next to their existing facility. This proposed development will need a zone change. This will be presented to the Planning Commission on January 21, 2026.
  - Mollie reported that the Port Authority is providing a Phase 1 assessment so they can apply for funds.

Mollie asked if Alan had any updates from the City related to Housing. Alan added to Meghan's report that he met with the 317 Board and their attorney. There is a mid-March deadline to apply for 2 million dollars so, it is a tight timeline. Alan hopes that the Planning Commission will vote on this at the meeting on January 21, 2026 or conduct a special session the following Wednesday because this zoning change requires a 30-day notice to the public. The project will accommodate 15 people with roof, heating, and water in a R3 multi-family unit. This is next to the two related facilities Adam Amanda house and the Clem house.

Mollie asked Solveig if she had any updates on the Ridges. Solveig responded that Chris Knisley and Joe Recchie reported that the approval is close, perhaps in February. Alan added that they did have the required meeting for 2025 in the last 15 days of December. The group swore in the City Council appointee of the Ohio University representative, and therefore are fully staffed as an organization.. Tentative meeting is planned for the first quarter of 2026. Alan reported that these meetings are open to the public and encouraged all to attend and ask questions. Alan described that as public meetings, these should be advertised to the public through various means but also encouraged the Commission to ask Chris Knisely to broadly publicize the meetings.

Solveig updated the group that the University Estates Woods Edge project is moving ahead. The first building is already up and have sheathing on it and the land around is cleared for construction.

Amy said there is a subcommittee for the Age-Friendly group called the Senior Housing Project. The group met in December but will meet again this coming Friday.

## **7. Annual Report Presentation**

Solveig reported that the presentation usually occurs in December but because of a busy few months, the presentation may happen in February. Shay and Solveig to present together. Members (who received the presentation from Solveig) are encouraged to provide Solveig with any changes/ concerns in layout, content, etc. Solveig did go over the minutes from last year to prepare the presentation. There is a slide on "Moving Forward". Solveig proposed that with ideas of the Commission, because members are busy, we as a Commission could work with ACF, Hapcap, etc. ex. Housing Co-Create to take on projects. The Athens County Foundation is a "nursery for new ideas and would be ideal partners for the Commission. The other option proposed by Solveig is to have subcommittees with consultants leading projects with ideas generated by the Commission.

There was a discussion that several Commission members did not receive the agenda and this could be an issue with the distribution list. Solveig mentioned that there is an ongoing issue with IT with the mailing/distribution list.

8. **Pew Charitable Trust article** – Solveig sent out [the article](#) via email and also provided printed copies to the Commission members. Solveig reported that the suggestions in the article are easy to address and could be taken up by the Commission to speed along the housing options. Solveig reported that one of the realtors is interested in several of the suggestions mentioned in the article and she would propose taking it to the Board of Realtors, with the Commission's approval. Some of the highlighted suggestions are:
- Land use reforms:
    - i. Apartments in commercially zoned areas
    - ii. Apartments near transit
    - iii. Allowing commercial buildings to be converted to apartments
    - iv. Allowing accessory dwelling units
    - v. Providing clarity on off-site construction, including modular and manufactured housing. Solveig recently toured one such housing that Habitat is building some modular homes in Chauncey.
    - vi. Addressing parking mandates- required vs. necessary
    - vii. Reducing lot sizes to allow for starter homes. Meghan has made this happen.
  - Greater efficiency
    - i. Promoting reforms that reduce pre-construction costs and speed up production. Efficient systems would be appreciated by contractors/developers.
    - ii. Digital systems
    - iii. Library of pre-approved plans that developers could use
    - iv. Third-party inspections and plan review
    - v. Using administrative rather than conditional approvals
    - vi. Pre-submission reviews or pre-approvals
    - vii. Phased approval

Solveig reiterated that these are relatively easy to discuss without too much investment in time. These have been discussed with Shay and some others in the community and Solveig thinks this actions would be welcomed. Mollie suggested that some more discussion could be warranted with input from the City Planner, Meghan.

Meghan responded acknowledging that she does not speak for Code. Meghan reported that some of the recommendations were already done. In regards to the first list of recommendations, Meghan reported that housing is allowed on commercially zoned land, B1 zone- on the ground floor, B2 and up- has to be on the second floor or above. This helps preserve the mixed use style of development that allows for housing as well as tax revenue.

Reducing minimum lot sizes is a new change and Meghan is interested in assessing how this affects development. Meghan reminded the group that online permit applications do exist. Meghan also pointed out that several of the above-mentioned recommendations would involve a local building department, which the City does not have the capacity for– such as, 3rd party inspections and plan review, is already done because the City does not have 1st party inspectors. Secondly, phased approval because the City does not issue local permits for foundations. Applicants are encouraged to complete presubmissions i.e. have meetings with

City officials but sometimes due to schedule conflicts this may not happen but the staff does review them before approval.

Meghan mentioned that the administrative vs. conditional approvals is vague/confusing because it does not specify what kind of approvals- BZA vs. residential vs. land use. Meghan mentioned that some of the other recommendations are already some she identified for the comprehensive plan, such as, allowing apartments near transit, ADUs, parking mandates. Meghan is not sure what the current code says about modular or manufactured housing but the Welcome Home Ohio project is using modular housing. Meghan specified that she got to recently tour the facility for Unibuilt (located Vandalia, Ohio- north of Dayton). This is the company used for the Welcome Home Ohio project. The company holds open tours every Saturday. Meghan mentioned that perhaps the Commission may be interested in a field trip. The company employs secure and energy efficient construction practices that could be interesting for the Commission to review.

Solveig pushed back on some of the responses from Meghan. Based on comments that Solveig has received from the community, the system of receiving permits from the City is slow- could be more efficient. There is a new Director of Code who also may be interested in doing things differently.

Alan suggested that members could rank order and provide to Shay (Chair) and the Commission tackles top 2-4 to concentrate on.

Mary suggested that the New Development subcommittee goes through each of these recommendations and other members can provide input. These can then be compared with the Code, then the committee can work on priorities as it pertains to Council or other appropriate stakeholders. Mary also reminded of other ways other than Unibuilt such as 3D, homes that can be put together. Mary asked Meghan if there are edits made to additions, are individuals required to provide those modifications to the Code office. Meghan responded "in theory". Meghan informed that because the City does not have a Local Building Department, the Code office is authorized to review a few things when looking at changes, such as, setbacks, heights, landuse- overages are usually ok. For example, if a property is reducing the number of apartments, that is not a problem but if adding, would want to know about required parking, etc.

Mollie suggested that with the Comprehensive Plan review, the Commission could help and engage with the community for input.

Megan Vogel suggested that she could create a tool and send it along to gather feedback. Megan will send this to all members to gather feedback.

## **9. Committee Reports (continued):**

**New Development Committee-** no reports

**Rental Inspections sub-committee-** Solveig reported that there is now a folder in the City's One Drive that can be accessed by anyone. This information needs to go to the Commission's website. A lot of information has already been gathered such as, Legal issues, Background and History, administrative, surveys, data from Code office inspections, etc. Folder available on the city website so it is transparent.

Surveys for tenants and landlords are being finalized. The group has decided against the IRB process. The survey (on Qualtrics) will go out the second week of February using QR codes and will be available through March/April/May. The new Code Director may not start until late February and it is the intention of the group to start distributing prior to the start date of the new Director. Roles for the members of the sub-committee to look at legal issues, efficiencies,

The group met with the University and it was reported that they do not have the capacity for creating a landlord network but the sub-committee is planning on moving forward with this anyway. The landlord representative on the sub-committee is interested in this for the landlords to opt in.

Megan Vogel asked that the survey be shared with her so she can help distribute it at the University. Solveig agreed to this and reported that she thinks there will be a lot of interest from renters since 70% of the population are renters. The survey group will clean the data in the summer and data analysis capacity is being investigated for the Fall.

Solveig also reported on an exciting project that involves Habitat for Humanity. They undertake projects that improve Community development and Economic development, The Southeast Habitat has decided they want to use the West side as a model. The association is meeting next week to discuss. The plan is to get a core group of 5-6 people who will oversee the project. Habitat will help the group write grants. The group will do an asset map (what people want) and then develop priorities to provide a comprehensive/ holistic plan. This could be a model for SE Ohio. Solveig reminded the group that this is not a city run or Habitat run project but grassroots efforts.

Solveig also said the group is working on a clean up project with the University on West Side for clean up of the bike path.

Mollie reminded that with the asset mapping to take into consideration the resources that are already available such as, a large portion of the West side (not the residential but the mixed use) is already in the DRD tax incentive program and has some grants/money associated with it for business owners and infrastructure improvements.

Solveig also encouraged other neighborhoods to take on such grassroots effort.

**Communication/Education Ad-Hoc Committee-** No updates

**10. For the Good of the Order**

None

**11. Concluding Remarks**

None

**12. Motion to Adjourn**

Mary made a motion, Polly seconded. All in favor. The meeting adjourned at 12:53 p.m.

*Minutes completed by Maria Modayil*