

# Affordable Housing Commission Minutes

March 17, 2026 at Noon  
City Administration Building – Council Chambers

**In attendance:** Mary Abel, Zack Dye, Maria Modayil, Meghan Jennings, Shay Myers, Amy Lipka, Solveig Spjeldnes, Polly Sumney\*, Alan Swank, Megan Vogel

\*Polly left 12:44pm

**Absent:** Mollie Fitzgerald

**Guests:** Rob Delach

## Link to YouTube recording of meeting:

 Athens Affordable Housing Commission - March 17, 2026

- 1. Introduction** – Chair Shay Myers started the meeting at 12:02 p.m. and read the AHC mission.
- 2. Establish Quorum** – Quorum met.
- 3. Disposition of Minutes** – Solveig moved to approve the minutes from February. Polly seconded. All other members present in favor and the motion passed. Minutes for February accepted.
- 4. City Update – Meghan Jennings (City Planning), Alan Swank (City Council), & Shay Myers (Board of Zoning Appeals)**

Welcome Home Ohio is moving along, finalizing purchase of the Red Cross property. Also, have a dry draft site plan that is being reviewed and modified. A committee meeting will be scheduled with the neighborhood in case any prospective buyers are interested.

Solveig requested that Meghan talk about how those interested could purchase one of these Welcome Home Ohio homes. Meghan asked that interested parties email Meghan (mjennings@ci.athens.oh.us) and she will then connect them to Joe Recchie, the developer. Joe has the details on the qualifications and has two people who are “pre-qualified”. Meghan is not sure about the mortgage end of the purchase but the two potential purchasers mentioned are qualified for the program.

Shay asked about the tentative time for this project. Meghan responded that they are aiming for the construction to start in the summer. From the draft plans, the majority of the homes will be built up with a garage (non-liveable) on the ground floor for floodplain mitigation. There will be two stories above the garage thus meeting the floodplain regulations. There is an intention to do 1-2 fully ADA compliant units which will have a slightly different plan to raise the property up to get them above the base flight elevation rather than a garage under the structure.

Shay asked if there will be parking at this elevated level and if there would be an accessible path to the house. Meghan responded that there would be a driveway on the ground level with a long ramp leading up to the front door. Meghan also added that the floodplain covers a lot of the

east side of Athens per the most recent updates to the floodplain maps. Meghan added that this will impact any new construction on the east side. There is about a 5 feet elevation difference between the actual ground level and the base flood elevation for the 100-year floodplain.

Meghan also reported that the Planning Commission has been discussing the regulations for sober living residencies. Currently, Athens does not have any regulations for this specific use. Those who live in sober living are federally protected under FHA and ADA and they are considered to have a disability if they are in recovery. The Planning Commission is navigating the federal regulations to see if Athens City can have zoning rules. There are some court cases currently in Ohio which the City Law Director, Lisa Eliason is following. Meghan added that the Planning Commission will be likely cancelled this week because of a lack of quorum. Meghan also thought it would be helpful to hear from organizations or members in the community to understand the direct experiences managing the need for these types of services in Southeastern Ohio. The community also needs to understand there are protections for these individuals and this is not irresponsible behavior by the community.

Solveig asked about the number of facilities in the community. Meghan responded that there are about 8-10 such "sober" houses in the community and have been in the community for a long time, with some great operators. However, there aren't any occupancy rates (how many can live in these homes) using the current regulations and that is what is being further discussed. Meghan added that the current occupancy rate is based on all other housing options which is 3-4 unrelated individuals per unit.

Alan reported on some City updates. The City Council Planning and Development committee will be discussing the Hudson Ave. If it is voted in the affirmative, it will advance to the City Council for the first reading on the first Monday of April (April 5). Alan added that the community may see fill on the field near the fire station (near the bike path). This is dirt from the new fire training station on Kenny Drive and will be used at a future date for the Welcome Home Ohio construction. Alan also reported that the 317 Board has asked for a zoning change and it was passed unanimously by the Planning Commission and it was at second reading at City Council last night. The zoning change is for Dairy Lane, past the 317 Board building. It is currently zoned educational and it is part of Ohio University. The zoning change would change this to a R3. Council had a reading and there was no expressed opposition for this. In relation to the sober living houses, Alan reported that at the last Planning Commission meeting, Andy Stone asked members of the community with questions/comments/concerns to direct those to David Riggs. Alan personally has received about half a dozen feedback from long-term residents of Athens. Alan has also reached out to 317 Board who has talked to other agencies about citing these sites in R1 neighborhoods. The general consensus has been to step back and wait to see how House Bill 58 plays out. This is a bipartisan bill which was passed by the House and was sponsored by a representative from Portsmouth (a registered Republican) as well as someone from Central Ohio/Columbus (a registered Democrat). The Bill is currently in the Senate and would put into place a few guidelines, regulations/guardrails. The Planning Commission would delay any recommendation so it is not in conflict with the City Law. The City Council does not plan to hear this issue on sober housing until/if there is a recommendation from the Planning Commission. Alan finally added that once Council approves (expected in early April) and the papers are signed for Welcome Home the construction (for entry-level housing) is supposed to start in 6 months— per the contract.

Shay reported on the Board of Zoning Appeals updates. There were a couple cases last week about sign standards/variances which could be related to some turnover in local businesses. The latest one was on East State Street. The other recurring theme at BZA is short-term rental.

The short term rental on State Street was approved and was adjacent to a local business and operated by a local business owner. This was unique because other short-term rentals are in R1 neighborhoods but this was in a B1 zoning.

## **5. Area Housing & Development Projects**

### **Age-Friendly Senior Housing**

Amy reported that housing is one out of five goals in our age-friendly Athens County plan and so age-friendly and its members have been involved in different housing discussions around the county. There isn't a specific senior housing project but the group is engaged in conversations where planning is underway. Amy is advising the County Planner on a Community Reinvestment Area (CRA) for Athens County that will affect unincorporated areas (not Athens City but could be a model for Athens City) that would incentivize accessible age-friendly design for residential units for renovations and new builds. This would consider 50% abatement over 5 years on the total improvement costs of renovations that would be accessible using universal design principles. The group is also talking about it in the regional planning commission and will go before the Commissioners in the next few months

Shay added that there is a second version of a CRA that is focused on energy efficient housing that is being planned. This uses accessible design and universal design criteria that other jurisdictions including the City of Cleveland. Shay added that one of the questions that comes with the CRA is the amount of flexibility that's allowed so it can be used in projects in the area. Shay mentioned the email Mollie sent with updates (Mollie was not at this meeting). Mollie has started conversations with a few in the City to adopt a similar CRA at the City level.

Amy added that the CRA is a tool that older adults could use to live in their homes/ age in place. Amy also discussed the other age-friendly project at the Ridges. There is interest in convening a monthly meeting with some age-friendly partners/ planners to discuss planning at the Ridges including the developer, Joe Recchie along with social service agencies, City/ County Planner, transportation. This committee has a different role– as in engagement, in comparison to the New Community Authority who is overseeing many of the legal aspects of the Ridges project. Amy reiterated that senior housing was only a small part of the larger conversations around housing at the Ridges.

Solveig questioned if the senior housing at the Ridges project was the first part of the project. Amy answered that per the presentation Joe provided, there are new builds that need to happen first to fund the mixed income apartments and to renovate the building. These could be "senior friendly" housing options, but there wouldn't be any restrictions and anyone could live there. Alan added that Joe has mentioned that the easiest builds would be the standalone (condos) on Dairy Lane and that "seniors income/means" who could afford \$300k+ homes would be the target and would be the starting point for construction. Alan added that the timeline communicated for the Ridges is now 2027.

### **Ridges**

Solveig responded that Amy is now leading the Ridges/senior living project. But, Solveig did add that Building 26 (next to the big auditorium) at the Ridges is being planned for senior luxury condos. There would be a total of 6 condos and there are a few community members who have expressed interest in this and since these are separate from the other housing projects, this may be an early construction project.

## 6. Committee Updates

**New Development Committee:** No reports

**Neighborhood Revitalization Committee:**

**Neighborhood Associations-** Amy reported that the Westside Community Association was approached by Habitat about creating a neighborhood revitalization Steering committee to plan for the west side neighborhood. The committee met for the first time last week and will be meeting bimonthly (twice a month). Habitat is facilitating/ guiding the members (6-8 members, not the full Westside Community Association). The group plans to do some community engagement/outreach and planning. This committee is not just for housing although housing could be a major part of the conversation.

Solveig added that Habitat has done this in other parts of the country and the Westside was chosen for a number of reasons. It is a five-year project to generate ideas that could enhance the community such as neighborhood garden, new playground, etc. There could be some grants available and Habitat would help with that piece. This would be a model for other communities. The Neighborhood Revitalization committee has not met formally but these are some of the ongoing projects.

Alan sought clarification for the term “revitalization” and wanted to know how the committee defined the term. Shay passed it along to Solveig to answer this. Solveig reported that the Revitalization committee was formed as a standing committee to the Affordable Housing Commission. Solveig said that it was a generic term to understand how our neighborhoods are thriving. Solveig added that this includes social events to get neighbors connected to each other. Solveig added that this sense of community can promote a sense of identity with their neighborhoods, keep lawns maintained or fix stuff. However, this is not an effort to gentrify neighborhoods and Solveig wanted to be very clear about that. Solveig reinforced that revitalization is about what neighbors wanted to do to keep neighborhoods thriving.

Alan asked if revitalization would include property conditions. He then passed along pictures that he received from a property owner on Euclid Ave. that highlighted a property on Euclid Ave that was not maintained. This is an owner occupied property in an R1 neighborhood. Alan did acknowledge that it being March, the lawns in most neighborhoods in the region are suffering. Alan wondered if property conditions should be a scope of the revitalization committee and noted that Athens “isn’t looking good right now” further noting that it is not any particular place but City-wide.

Shay responded that property conditions are Code Enforcement questions and that perhaps they should be invited to a future meeting. Shay added that now there is a new Code Enforcement Director this could be an appropriate step and that some of these issues are interrelated. Shay further clarified that the Affordable Housing Commission is an advisory committee and as such has limits to its scope.

Alan reported that the Affordable Housing Commission is a representative body and Alan, as Chair of the Planning and Development Committee of Council, believes that when a good representative sample of Athens citizens speak up, it may hold more influence. Alan added that he is a big proponent of pride in one’s property, neighborhood, and city but it starts with the individual homeowner/ property owner taking care of their property. Alan urged that the commission continue to provide guidance in this direction and that he will also relay this matter

to other members of the Planning & Development Committee of City Council and perhaps the whole council if deemed appropriate.

Solveig responded that this Commission has discussed this previously and talked about modeling after other communities that have angel programs/ talent sharing opportunities that share community responsibilities such as maintaining a lawn or shoveling a driveway, or volunteering in exchange for another needed service. Solveig used the example of a friend who lives in Pittsburgh and whose community has a similar program that brings the community together– having potlucks, and the like. Solveig added that these themes could also be integrated into the comprehensive plan that Meghan is spearheading.

Shay noted that Rural Action at their Makerspace has a skill swap board. Solveig replied that perhaps the Commission can approach Rural Action and see how it could be expanded and “let’s make it happen”.

**Rental Inspection Processes Subcommittee (RIPS)**- Solveig reported that the surveys are live and that press releases were sent out– Athens Messenger, WOUB, Athens Independent. Also working with the student newspapers- The Post and The New Political. They also have flyers around the City and are expanding the reach. So far, 127 landlords and 210 tenants (goal is a 1000 responses) have responded to the survey and the surveys are live until May 31st. The emails were sent out to the landlords based on what email the City Code Office had- 578 landlords/ property managers. Solveig reported that all RIPS members are very active and have committed to tasks related to the project. Solveig further added that Bob Prebe would like to step down from the committee due to time commitment but has agreed to stay engaged as time permits and volunteer. Ric Wasserman is interested in taking Bob’s place on the committee. Ric had initially requested a position on the committee and is the County Treasurer, a landlord, and has been in the community for several years. RIPS has approved this change. This would need to be approved by this Commission.

Solveig further added that the research team is starting to analyze the survey results, best practices, interviews, data from Code Office. There is a page under the AHC website for the RIPS. The public can review any of these materials. Solveig and Jim Kauffman (Director of Real Estate, Ohio University) will be meeting with the new Director of Code, Tom Pyle (who was the formerly retired Police Chief). David Riggs will be continuing (not sure for how long) and is handling flood issues at ¼ time until he can fully retire. Solveig thanked Megan V. for putting the survey in the student newsletter. Solveig asked the members of the commission to help by putting it on social media and will provide the updated flyer with the link. Maria suggested that graduation weekend and fest weekends may be a good opportunity for tabling around this as well. Solveig reiterated that the committee members are all being very responsive and contributing to this process meaningfully. Megan V. suggested that Ohio University student senates could be a good avenue for increased responses. Solveig plans to approach Student Senate and Graduate Student Senate and do some interviews as well. Solveig further added that the survey was vetted by landlords, property managers, tenants, attorneys, etc.

Shay asked what is the next step to this project. Solveig responded that she has an outline for the final presentation as well as project steps. Solveig is looking into best practices, meeting with Code Office employees to make this a collaborative process so that their work is easier in the long run. Solveig added that she is also looking at some other model communities. Solveig is also hoping that she can work with the landlords to create a landlord network and explore other innovative ideas. This is a systemic review of how the rental housing conditions can be improved that also incentivizes landlords to do better. One of the subgroups is reviewing the

financials with the Code Office and could come up with suggestions that are legally and financially sound (especially given the budget for the City). The Legal group of the committee is looking into the federal and state law and what is possible in terms of incentives, insurance, and many more. Solveig mentioned that the committee is also looking at how much it costs to have a Code Officer based on the number of rentals and other responsibilities by providing a formula to prioritize/ triage/ make it easier to complete inspections in a fair way. Solveig thinks this is a good time to have this review as it would help the new Code Director.

Shay informed that on the issue of permitting and code enforcement and inspections, there are unique challenges with local approvals not just for rental inspections but also multi-family projects (over four units) or commercial projects— there isn't anyone locally who can do these and therefore, the State has jurisdiction for permitting commercial/rental units over 4 units, and Washington County has jurisdiction over plumbing permits. This makes it difficult and sets the need for going to multiple entities for approvals. This also means that the fee from these inspection processes go elsewhere as well. Shay noted that there is interest from the construction industry to have these funds benefit locally so these are assets benefit to the local community. Solveig responded that the Mayor and Andy Stone have mentioned wanting building inspection completed locally but Athens does not have the resources but this could be a revenue generator from the surrounding communities. Solveig also added that the RIPS is also looking at technology and technological advances that can help/ make things more efficient. Solveig thinks that the current project with RIPS can be the first step to hopefully in the future exploring other building inspection processes. Solveig did acknowledge the competing interests but reinforced that this is for the benefit of all renters, students, and community at large— especially since 70% of the Athens population are renters. Solveig has heard that the survey got to the Parents group on Facebook and parents were also excited about this. Solveig encouraged anyone who was interested in talking more about this to contact her. The RIPS has about 15 volunteers who would like to stay involved.

Solveig made a motion to approve Ric Wasserman to replace Bob Prebe on RIPS subcommittee, Amy seconded, all in agreement.

**Neighborhood Associations & Activities-** Rob Delach (124 Morris Ave., Athens) reported on the Athens Porch Fest as the President of the Athens Porchfest Board. Near Eastside neighborhood has done a porchfest for the last two years and this year, they are expanding to the West side and uptown.

The Westside neighborhood will host porchfest on Saturday, May 16, noon to 6 p.m. (similar scale of the first year porchfest)-- 23 performances, 5 businesses (StewMac, Cider House)— they will have the Crafty Art Bus, food trucks, 15 porches hosting music.

Saturday evening will be the DORA kickoff and the uptown event, "Porchfest on the Bricks" with busking and Jorma Kaukonen performing.

On Sunday, May 17, 11- 9:30 p.m. will be the Near Eastside Porchfest. Over 100 performances are expected from the three events. This may be the largest music festival in SE Ohio as far as performances. The kickoff will be at the Village Bakery and Kiser's BBQ and the closing at JO's Taproom. This is meant to be a local event to support local artists and local businesses. Shay and Solveig commented that this is an amazing event to build community in our neighborhoods. Solveig asked Rob how he was going to market this event. Rob responded that he has a grant submitted to the Athens Visitor's Bureau to help market beyond the County. 13% of the

respondents from the survey last year reported that they were from outside of the region. Rob reported that his goal is to draw more people from outside the county.

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

**7. For the Good of the Order:**

Alan reported that the Planning Commission meeting is officially cancelled for May 18

Maria asked about the HAPCAP project on Columbus Rd. Solveig responded that she talked to one of the leaders recently and they are trying to get the right contractor as all the bids were too high.

**8. Concluding Remarks:** None

**9. Motion to Adjourn**

Megan V. moved to adjourn the meeting at 12:58 p.m. All in favor.

*Minutes completed by Maria Modayil, Secretary, Affordable Housing Commission.*