

Addressing Housing Shortages in Central Ohio: A Multi-Faceted Approach to Accommodate Economic Growth

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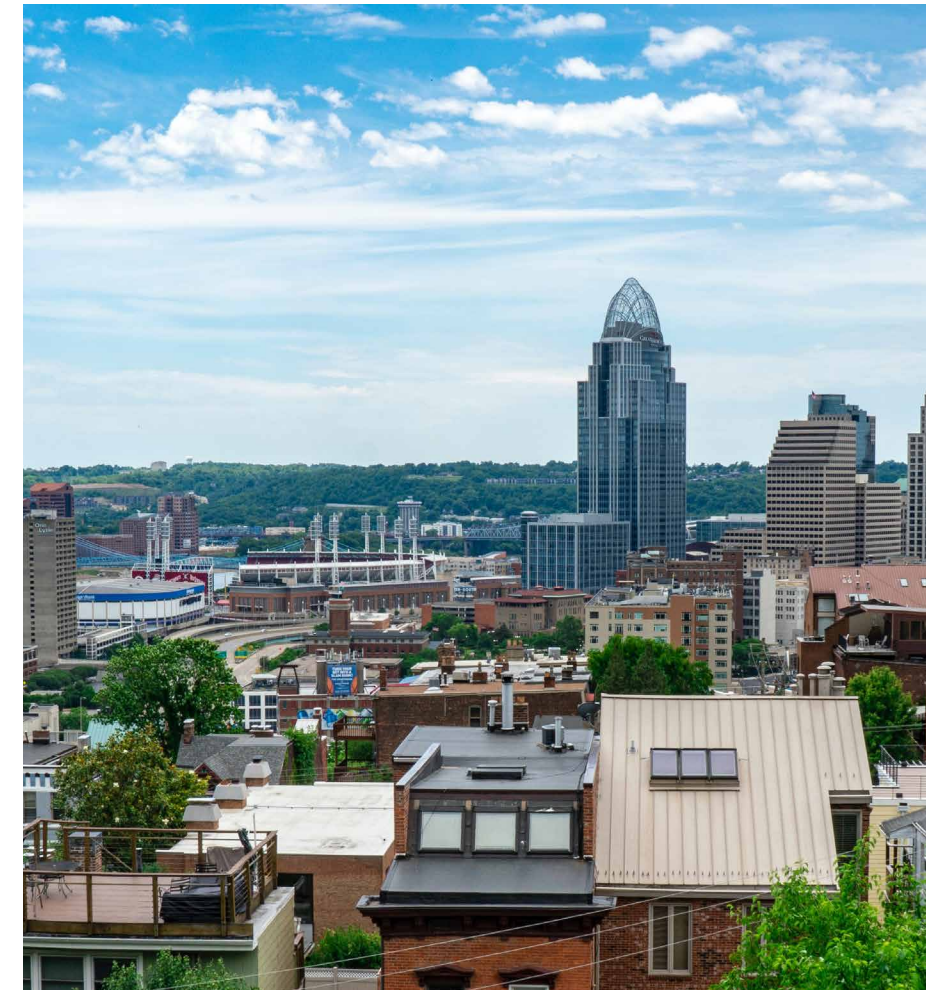
Central Ohio is not unfamiliar with rapid increases in housing demand stemming from economic growth and job creation. Erin Prosser, Assistant Director of Housing Strategies for the City of Columbus, recently told NPR that Columbus, historically an affordable housing market, experienced a surge in population between 2010 and 2020, largely due to a strong focus on job creation coming out of the 2008 recession, a time when very little new construction had taken place (Vugrincic, 2023). The region now faces a similar challenge, with suburban counties generally becoming 2.2% more underproduced between 2019 and 2021 and mid-high-cost counties like Franklin County, which contains a majority of Columbus, seeing underproduction increase by 9.8%.

Intel's recent announcement they will be building a chip fabrication facility in Licking County, integral to the nation's economic security and the biggest private sector investment in the state's history, has made addressing housing underproduction urgent again. In a region already experiencing significant housing shortages, failure to meet the housing needs of thousands of new jobs from both Intel and its suppliers could threaten job growth in the area. "Without the housing

product, it can easily stifle the workforce needs of Intel and others," Jamie Green, a planning consultant for the Licking County Framework, told USA Today (Welsh-Huggins, 2022).

A housing needs assessment produced by the Building Industry Association (BIA) of Central Ohio determined that the area needed to double its current 8,000 annual housing production to meet current and future needs (2002), a number arrived at before factoring in the new Intel fab. Affordable housing is at the center of the issue. BIA found that the increase in median home sale prices has far outpaced the median household income growth, noting this trend will "further exacerbate affordability housing challenges in the Columbus region and will limit the Columbus market from realizing job growth projections" (BIA, 2022).

Through comprehensive planning initiatives, zoning code revisions, innovative community projects, and a robust ecosystem of resources for those needing affordable housing, Central Ohio is taking a multi-faceted approach to respond to this urgent issue.



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Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission Regional Housing Study (2020)

In response to their projection that Central Ohio would grow to more than 3 million people by 2050 (Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission [MORPC], 2015), the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission (MORPC) produced a pivotal Regional Housing Strategy in 2020. Supported by an Advisory Board of regional stakeholders

and funded by a consortium of 26 partners (including all the region's cities), the study analyzed housing trends, population growth projections, and economic forecasts to comprehensively understand the housing needs across Central Ohio (MORPC, 2020).

The Strategy quantified 13 regional housing submarkets throughout the region for analysis and characterized each based on economic conditions, demographics, and challenges and

opportunities for future investment. It identified barriers, such as land use processes and standards, higher costs of residential development, regulatory costs, and NIMBY sentiments. More than 150 possible actions were identified that were relevant to each of the housing submarkets, and the Strategy now serves as a foundation for informed decision-making by policymakers and stakeholders as they work toward new initiatives and solutions.

Framework Planning in Licking County in Response to Intel's Microchip Fab

Intel's announcement they would build a \$20 billion microchip fabrication facility in Central Ohio triggered both excitement and fear around the growth that will come from the investment. More than 7,000 new jobs are projected for the building of the facility, with Intel projecting they'll need 3,000 high-tech, high-wage workers once the plant is operational. In addition, hundreds of jobs will be created as Intel suppliers move into the area and service businesses expand to serve a larger customer base. The impact on the region will be immense, both economically and socially. While it will be felt throughout Central Ohio, the center point is Licking County. Wanting to intentionally prepare for Intel's investment, leaders from each community in the county collaborated to develop a Framework Planning initiative.

Led by the Thomas J. Evans Foundation and supported by experienced urban planning firm Planning Next, the 15 local jurisdictions in the county are working together to plan for impacts on land use, housing, education, and transportation. By identifying areas for housing development, ensuring transportation infrastructure, and preserving green spaces, Licking County is proactively shaping its future while avoiding housing imbalances that often accompany rapid job creation.

Columbus's Zone In Initiative

The City of Columbus, recognizing the importance of revisiting its zoning code to align with the changing housing landscape, launched The Zone In

initiative in November 2022 to facilitate housing production and diversity. Establishing an Advisory Committee and working directly with community stakeholders, the City engaged in extensive citizen outreach and education, helping create buy-in to changes to existing code that hadn't seen a makeover since the 1950s. According to the Zone In website, the region needs to double the number of units built each year, and without updating zoning codes, the City's commitment to equitable opportunities for all its residents cannot be achieved.

By eliminating outdated restrictions, promoting mixed-use developments, and simplifying permitting processes, Columbus aims to attract a broader range of housing investment that caters to various income levels. This forward-thinking approach addresses the immediate housing shortage and positions the city for sustainable growth.

Infill Housing Development by Central Ohio Community Improvement Corporation

Central Ohio Community Improvement Corporation (COCIC) is playing a vital role in mitigating the housing crisis through innovative infill housing development. A land bank and land trust serving Franklin County, Ohio, COCIC identifies underutilized spaces within urban areas and transforms them into affordable housing located near job centers and public amenities. Their work includes getting site control of tax-delinquent properties, demolition when appropriate, partnership with private investors and developers, and obtaining loan and development grants.

This approach optimizes existing resources, fosters community engagement, revitalizes neighborhoods, and provides housing solutions in

areas where new construction might be challenging. A study by the Greater Ohio Policy Center found that COCIC's efforts resulted in the demolition of more than 3,300 blighted properties and produced 347 units of affordable housing (2022).

Conclusion

Central Ohio's response to the underproduction of housing units in the face of remarkable economic growth and job creation exemplifies the region's commitment to tackling the difficult path to sustainable and affordable development. Its multidimensional approach and understanding of the importance of strategic planning, collaborative initiatives, and adaptive policies are working to ensure that accessible housing options keep pace with the region's economic prosperity, which can serve as a model for other areas around the country facing similar challenges.



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Mark Barbash is the Founder and Director of the Ohio Economic Development Institute—the training program for the Ohio Economic Development Association—and an instructor at the Ohio State University John Glenn College of Public Affairs, where he was recognized as the Outstanding Undergraduate Instructor in 2023. His economic development career includes being Chief Economic Development Officer for the State of Ohio, Director of Development for the City of Columbus, and Vice-President of the National Development Council. Barbash has served on the Board of Directors for the International Economic Development Council among other associations. As a nationally recognized economic developer and economic development trainer, he has taught for the National Development Council, the International Economic Development Council, the U.S. Small Business Administration, NASA, the Economic Development Institute, and multiple state-level courses. A recipient of the Fellow Member designation from the International Economic Development Council and SBA's Small Business Finance Advocate, he has had leadership roles in finance and development for the city of Columbus, the State of Ohio, and private-sector organizations.

