



# Mayor's Housing Commission

## City of Norfolk Meeting Minutes

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September 15, 2025, at 4:00pm  
Norfolk City Hall, 10<sup>th</sup> Floor Conference Room  
810 Union Street, Norfolk VA 23510

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The following Commission Members were present: Councilman Carlos Clanton (Co-Chair), Councilman Jeremy McGee (Co-Chair), City Manager Patrick Roberts, City Attorney Bernard Pishko, Dr. Susan Perry, Commissioner Deborah Stearns, Commissioner Fred Napolitano, and Commissioner Georgette Houchins

### **I. AGENDA OVERVIEW** by *Councilman Carlos Clanton and Councilman Jeremy McGee*

Councilman Clanton opened the meeting, outlining the agenda which focused on a comprehensive review of the city's current funding for housing initiatives. The recent creation of a digital depository for all commission documents since the last meeting was discussed. The primary goals for the meeting were to review the city's current housing funding streams, discuss the Housing Department's strategic plan, and consider the formation of subcommittees.

The co-chairs emphasized that the commission's role is to provide actionable recommendations to the City Council and to expand community input by incorporating more diverse voices into the process of updating the city's housing policy.

### **II. CITY HOUSING FUNDING** by *City Manager Patrick Roberts and Dr. Susan Perry*

City Manager Roberts initiated the discussion by referencing a memo detailing all city funding for housing, eviction mitigation, and homelessness programs. He explained his rationale for hesitating to create a formal housing trust fund in the current fiscal year but noted that a few million dollars in unallocated, one-time funds are available for potential projects.

Dr. Susan Perry then provided a comprehensive presentation, framing housing as critical city infrastructure. She detailed the city's various housing investments, including \$2 million set aside for new construction that could seed a future trust fund, federal and local funds for rehabilitation, housing subsidies and vouchers, and support for developers. She also covered funding for support services like homelessness prevention and enforcement activities like fair housing investigations. Specific projects were highlighted, such as the \$2.8 million allocated for the Globe Iron site's demolition and remediation

and significant capital investments in the St. Paul's area. It was also clarified that proceeds from the sale of city-owned lots go to the city's general fund, not a departmental fund.

Dr. Perry gave the example of a developer seeking to pair city funds with federal tax credits and their need for predictability.

Councilman Clanton supported the trust fund as a strategic tool, suggesting a non-profit-managed fund could leverage private or foundation funds unavailable to government entities.

City Attorney Pishko raised the key governance question of who would make funding decisions.

Commissioners discussed varying viewpoints, including that the current system is functional; missing only a dedicated, recurring source of funds. Some sided with the idea that a trust fund could access different financing, such as discounted loans from banks. Others questioned the practical benefits, arguing the City already leverages funds effectively and requested specific examples of financing sources that a trust fund could access that the city cannot.

Dr. Perry reiterated that a dedicated trust fund with a clear application cycle gives the developers confidence to invest in the application process. Without it, the developers might fear that city priorities will shift and funding will become unavailable, causing them to pass on the project. A housing trust fund provides certainty to the development community for long-term planning and could be used to entice developers to build mixed-income communities.

### **III. HOUSING DEPARTMENT STRATEGIC PLAN** *by Dr. Susan Perry*

Dr. Perry presented the department's strategic plan, which builds on a 2023 commission study and focuses on creating new housing, preserving existing stock, and incentivizing the conversion of commercial properties. A central debate emerged over the creation of a formal Housing Trust Fund. Dr. Perry and some commissioners argued it would provide a stable, predictable funding source and could leverage additional private financing. Conversely, City Attorney Bernard Pishko and City Manager Patrick Roberts questioned its advantages over the current, efficient project-based funding system and raised concerns about governance.

Discussion was had regarding the city's focus on low-income versus middle-income housing. Mr. Pishko opined that efforts are overwhelmingly concentrated on low-income options, while Councilman Clanton positioned this imbalance as the core issue the commission was formed to address. The discussion also touched on the need for a regional approach to housing, as Norfolk is nearing "saturation" with low-income units. Other strategies discussed included promoting mixed-income developments city-wide, establishing a formal policy for disposing of city land, and supporting contractor training programs to address a shortage of builders.

Dr. Perry argued the benefits of a regional approach and outlined strategies for building new housing and preserving existing neighborhoods.

City Attorney Pishko reinforced the necessity of a regional approach, stating that neighboring cities need to "share some of the load" for subsidized housing.

Councilman Clanton stated the Council needs to support the plan to provide clear direction for budget priorities and suggested finding a new term for "affordable housing" to remove negative stigma.

Councilman McGee questioned if the plan would lead to the neglect of areas not designated as "areas of opportunity" and if funding was sufficient.

Commission discussion included preserving existing communities and the potential of urban renewal initiatives and investments. Commissioner Stearns questioned the absence of any fiscal alignment of the draft strategic plan with City resources and budgets and expressed concern over Strategy #2 and the policy recommendation to "prevent gentrification."

#### **IV. SUBCOMMITTEE ASSIGNMENTS** *by Councilman Carlos Clanton and Councilman Jeremy McGee*

The co-chairs proposed a "divide and conquer" strategy by forming three subcommittees to streamline the commission's work: 1) Policy and Data; 2) Development, Preservation, and Finance; and 3) Equity and Community Engagement. The intent is for these groups to perform in-depth analysis and bring focused recommendations back to the full commission. However, Commissioner Deborah Stearns expressed concern that forming subcommittees might delay urgent recommendations needed for major city projects. The discussion concluded without a final decision, and the matter was deferred to the next meeting for further consideration.

Councilman Clanton proposed the subcommittees to accelerate progress by allowing smaller groups to focus on specific items between full commission meetings.

Councilman McGee supported the idea to better organize the work and engage the community.

Some commissioners voiced concern that creating subcommittees could slow down the process, especially with time-sensitive issues.

The final decision on creating the subcommittees was deferred. However, there was a consensus to allow Councilman Clanton to begin soliciting interest from the community for potential members to save time if the structure is formally approved.

Councilman McGee asked that the Commissioners review the proposed subcommittee structure and its potential impact on the timeline for discussion at the October meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:35 pm.

**Next Meeting:**

**Monday, October 20, 2025, at 4:00 p.m.**

