



Mayor's Housing Commission

City of Norfolk Meeting Minutes

January 26, 2026, at 4:00pm
Norfolk City Hall, 10th Floor Conference Room
810 Union Street, Norfolk VA 23510

The following Commission Members were present: Councilman Carlos Clanton (Co-Chair), Councilman Jeremy McGee (Co-Chair), City Manager Patrick Roberts, Chief Deputy City Attorney Adam Melita, Commissioner Deborah Stearns, Commissioner Fred Napolitano, Commissioner Earl Fraley, Commissioner Georgette Houchins, Commissioner Simon Scott, and Commissioner Vilma Corbin

I. CALL TO ORDER AND WELCOME *by Councilman Carlos Clanton and Councilman Jeremy McGee*

The meeting was formally called to order at 4:00 p.m. by Councilman Carlos Clanton. He opened the session by acknowledging the presence of both Commission members and a significant number of new faces, specifically expressing gratitude to the community members who signed up to serve as subcommittee members. He emphasized the critical value of their input and feedback as the commission prepared to dive deeper into its processes. After introducing himself and his colleague, Councilman Jeremy McGee, Councilman Clanton acknowledged the agenda ahead and promptly handed the floor to Councilman McGee to facilitate the administrative portion of the meeting.

Councilman McGee thanked everyone for attending despite the chilly weather and moved to initiate the official proceedings, setting a collaborative and focused tone for the session.

II. OVERVIEW OF AGENDA AND APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Councilman McGee presented the agenda and the minutes from the previous meeting, which had been distributed to all attendees prior to the start of the session. He requested any corrections or amendments from the floor. Hearing none, Councilman Clanton moved for the approval of the minutes as presented, and the motion was properly seconded. Councilman McGee opened the floor for discussion, but with no further comments raised, a vote was taken. The motion to approve the minutes and agenda passed unanimously with a voice vote.

III. POLICY IMPACT OF HOUSING AND REVIEW OF SECTION 5 RECOMMENDATIONS

Councilman McGee introduced City Manager Roberts, who began his presentation by referencing the commission's founding resolution, particularly Section 5, which outlines its core responsibilities.

City Manager Roberts welcomed the council members and commissioners, wishing everyone a Happy New Year. He prefaced his presentation by noting the density of the information to be

covered, assuring the group that he intended to move efficiently while avoiding rushing, to allow for questions and high-level engagement.

City Manager Roberts began with a review of the commission's progress on the checklist mandated by the establishing resolution. He highlighted several completed objectives, noting that the commission has successfully identified the housing inventory and established that Norfolk possesses a significant share of units affordable across all income levels. Data confirmed that Norfolk has a much higher share of rental housing, approximately 57 percent, compared to the national average of 36 percent. He also discussed the validated correlation between housing types and educational costs, noting that large-family units incur higher educational burdens, while age-restricted units, though alleviating school costs, often increase demand for EMS services. Furthermore, the commission concluded that housing vouchers are versatile tools effective for both immediate housing needs and transitioning residents to homeownership.

Mr. Roberts then introduced Carl Larsen from the City's Civic Lab to present new data regarding the fiscal impact of single-family residential neighborhoods. Mr. Larsen explained the methodology, which analyzed one-tenth of a square mile samples in various neighborhoods including Brandon Place, Broad Creek, Colonial Place, East Ocean View, Ghent, Glenwood Park, and Huntersville. The analysis tracked calls for service, Norfolk Public Schools enrollment, and tax revenue.

During the presentation on East Ocean View, Councilman Clanton raised a significant point regarding demographic variables. He suggested that low service calls and high revenue in that area might be attributed to a wealthier retiree population, whereas historical and systemic factors play a major role in neighborhoods like Huntersville. He urged the commission to consider real-life variables, such as an aging population driving medical calls, rather than viewing the data purely through a fiscal lens. Mr. Larsen acknowledged these valid points, clarifying that while the study attempts a fiscal comparison, it cannot capture every variable such as sales tax revenue or historic context.

Following the fiscal analysis, Dr. Susan Perry, Director of Housing and Community Development, took the lectern to lead a detailed presentation regarding the distribution and impact of subsidized housing across the Hampton Roads region. Using data from the National Housing Preservation Database, she compared Norfolk against neighboring municipalities. The data revealed significant disparities, with Newport News and Norfolk shouldering the majority of the region's affordable inventory, while Virginia Beach and Chesapeake maintained significantly fewer units. Dr. Perry highlighted a critical imbalance: while Norfolk is home to only 17 percent of the region's population, it houses 48 percent of the region's public housing. Conversely, Virginia Beach holds 31 percent of the population but contains zero public housing.

Councilman Clanton expressed concern regarding the data on special populations, noting that while they might not strain schools in other cities, the sheer volume of such residents in Norfolk creates a disproportionate draw on other resources like the Community Services Board. Dr. Perry agreed, noting that when neighboring cities fail to build their share of affordable housing, Norfolk inevitably becomes the destination for the region, reducing stock for existing residents.

The conversation also touched on regional planning. Councilman Clanton inquired about the status of the regional housing study being conducted with the Planning District Commission. City Manager Roberts confirmed that an update is anticipated soon, though details have been sparse. Chief Deputy Attorney Adam Melita raised a question regarding the geographical clustering of subsidized

housing and its impact on property values, to which Dr. Perry clarified that a cross-city regional analysis on clustering effects had not yet been performed.

The group agreed that Commissioners are to review the fiscal impact data regarding single-family neighborhoods to inform future recommendations on housing mix. Furthermore, staff will continue to refine data where possible, acknowledging limitations regarding non-property tax revenues.

IV. COASTAL VIRGINIA BUILDING INDUSTRY ASSOCIATION UPDATE

Director of Planning, Robert Tajan, was introduced to discuss development processes. Councilman McGee introduced this segment by summarizing a productive recent meeting with the Coastal Virginia Building Industry Association (CVBIA), which he and Commissioner Deborah Stearns attended.

Director Tajan began by reaffirming his mandate to analyze and simplify development processes. He explained that since the adoption of the 2018 zoning ordinance, state and international codes have caught up to Norfolk's resilience standards, creating redundant regulations. Director Tajan announced that the department intends to pull back on specific zoning requirements where other modern codes now provide sufficient coverage to streamline compliance.

A major topic of discussion was the challenge of utility infrastructure. Builders have expressed frustration not with tap fees, but with the logistical difficulty of installation due to labor shortages. The Commission compared Norfolk's model to the City of Suffolk, where the city manages installations. It was determined that Planning staff will engage Public Utilities to discuss the feasibility of Norfolk assuming a greater role in tap installations and to review the alignment of fees with service costs.

Addressing staffing, Director Tajan admitted that finding qualified plan reviewers is difficult. To mitigate this, the city is shifting its hiring strategy to prioritize customer service skills and trade backgrounds. The department is currently in the process of hiring a permit coordinator and backfilling positions for a residential plan reviewer and a permit technician. Operationally, workflow is being restructured to allow technical reviewers to focus exclusively on plan analysis, and Director Tajan committed to re-implementing in-person, walk-in counter services at the Development Services Center by late spring or early summer.

On the topic of technology, Councilman Clanton raised the potential for utilizing AI to expedite reviews. Director Tajan confirmed that preliminary discussions with AI companies are underway. To improve submission quality, the department plans to implement stricter submission screening protocols to ensure only complete applications enter the review queue. Additionally, staff will work to simplify the application process and explore legal avenues to accept fully digital signatures to eliminate the paper requirement.

Director Tajan also discussed the "resilience quotient," noting the city intends to simplify requirements for single-family homes—replacing rain barrel mandates with tree-planting requirements—and converting the quotient into a bonus system for commercial developments. Staff committed to reaching out to builders outside the CVBIA and design professionals to discuss these upcoming changes while proceeding with the necessary zoning amendments.

Commissioner Fred Napolitano provided industry feedback, praising the staff for reigniting communication and resolving clarity issues. Chief Deputy City Attorney Adam Melita provided a legislative update. The General Assembly is considering bills that could preempt local authority to address the housing crisis, including mandating ADUs and expedited approval timelines.

V. CONCLUDING REMARKS AND ROUND ROBIN

The meeting concluded with a round-robin introduction facilitated by Councilman Clanton to foster familiarity among the Commissioners and the subcommittee members. Commissioner Georgette Houchins raised a key question about how Norfolk can increase affordable housing given its high density and lack of available land. Commissioner Vilma Corbin and Commissioner Deborah Stearns expressed appreciation for the educational nature of the work, with Commissioner Stearns requesting that meeting minutes be distributed earlier than the day of the next meeting.

Councilman Clanton emphasized the need to include young professionals in the housing conversation to prevent brain drain. He set a target for the commission, stating the goal is to have a draft timeline for recommendations by June. Councilman McGee thanked the city staff for their heavy lifting on the data analysis, reminding the commission that they have successfully answered many of the key questions established in Section 5 of the creating ordinance.

Councilman Clanton noted that the committee work will now transition from data gathering to actionable ideas. Subcommittees are expected to meet at 4pm on Monday, February 23, 2026, in the 10th Floor Council Conference Room at Norfolk City Hall.

City Manager Roberts concluded by affirming that the commission has largely completed its initial fact-finding mandates and is now entering the phase of determining policy recommendations. The group adjourned with a clear understanding of the transition from data review to policy formulation.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:22 pm.

Next Meeting:

***Monday, February 23, 2026, at 4:00 p.m.
Norfolk City Hall – 10th floor Council Conference Room***