



Mayor's Housing Commission

City of Norfolk Meeting Minutes

October 20, 2025, 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, City Attorney Bernard Pishko, Commissioner Deborah Stearns, Commissioner Fred Napolitano, Commissioner Earl Fraley, Commissioner Simon Scott, Commissioner Vilma Corbin, and Commissioner Georgette Houchins

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

The meeting began with Councilman Clanton raising concerns about renovictions, referencing a surge in public feedback. He emphasized the challenge of balancing developers' property rights with the city's duty to protect residents and noted his ongoing efforts to find solutions.

Councilman McGee highlighted the Pelham Place project in Ghent as the catalyst for the discussion. He described the building as long neglected, with recent redevelopment plans threatening to displace long-term tenants through steep rent increases. Councilman McGee stressed the need to explore available city tools to address such issues, while recognizing the constraints of state law.

II. DISCUSSION ON RENOVICTIONS

City Manager Patrick Roberts directed staff to explore ways the city could support affected residents, despite limited authority over the developer. He introduced Kimberly Pierce, Director of Neighborhood Services, to present available resources.

Director Pierce outlined eviction prevention efforts, focusing on the "Rent Ready Local" program, which educates tenants and landlords on rights, responsibilities, and lease understanding. She emphasized the importance of early engagement, noting that intervention is far more effective before formal eviction proceedings begin. Her department offers guidance on lease issues, maintenance concerns, and connects residents to additional support services.

Councilman Clanton highlighted the need for residents to seek help early, which Director Pierce confirmed is critical. Councilman McGee asked whether her team was working with Pelham Place residents; Director Pierce said they had not yet been contacted but educational resources remain available.

City Manager Roberts asked if the department helps residents access housing assistance. Director Pierce confirmed they refer individuals to other programs, including emergency relief options.

City Manager Roberts summarized that early contact with Neighborhood Services is key to exploring all available housing options. Councilman McGee introduced the term “renovictions” and asked if the city was tracking the trend. Director Pierce acknowledged it as a growing issue, with upgrades often pricing out long-term tenants.

Dr. Susan Perry, Director of Housing and Community Development, questioned whether 30-day notices give tenants enough time to relocate. Director Pierce agreed the timeframe is short but legally compliant.

City Attorney Bernard Pishko clarified that month-to-month tenants without proper notice may be entitled to remain for another year, though this likely didn’t apply to Pelham Place residents, whose leases had expired and were lawfully terminated.

Commissioner Georgette Houchins asked whether the renovation permit process could trigger longer tenant notice requirements. This led Councilman McGee to question City Attorney Bernard Pishko about the city’s authority to extend notice periods or impose rent caps.

City Attorney Pishko explained that the city lacks legal authority in such matters, as the situation at Pelham Place involves non-renewal of leases rather than formal evictions. He cautioned against discouraging renovations, citing the building’s poor condition and the broader issue of neglected properties. He emphasized that federal, state, and local incentives—including tax credits and a 15-year city tax abatement—are designed to encourage such upgrades.

Commissioners Fraley and Scott sought clarification on the city’s tax relief program. City Attorney Pishko confirmed that the abatement applies only to the increased property value post-renovation and acknowledged that developers can combine multiple incentives, including LIHTC and preservation credits.

Councilman McGee, referencing his visit to Pelham Place, acknowledged the need for renovations but reiterated concern for displaced tenants. He asked again whether the city could require longer notice periods, and City Attorney Pishko confirmed that only the state has that authority.

Councilman McGee then raised the broader issue of the Dillon Rule, which limits local powers. City Attorney Pishko recounted past efforts to advocate for Home Rule and noted that while Norfolk’s charter grants substantial taxing authority, broader local control remains a long-term goal.

Commissioner Fred Napolitano suggested exploring the use of tax incentives as leverage in discussions with developers.

III. REVIEW OF STATUS ON SECTION 5 DATA

Councilman McGee moved the meeting to the next agenda item: a presentation on Section 5 data by Housing and Community Development Director Susan Perry.

Dr. Perry outlined three areas of research: the fiscal impact of housing, its connection to educational outcomes, and broader economic challenges. Her team consulted various experts and institutions, including VCU and local school officials.

On fiscal impact, Director Perry explained that findings are mixed. Some studies suggest affordable and multifamily housing can reduce emergency service costs and improve efficiency through density. Others, like one from Massachusetts, showed potential deficits due to increased school costs and undervalued tax assessments. She emphasized that outcomes vary based on housing type, scale, and local context, and recommended localized fiscal impact studies for Norfolk.

Councilman McGee noted the complexity of the findings and asked for a clearer takeaway. City Manager Roberts responded that fiscal impact largely depends on unit size and resident income—larger units and lower-income households typically require more city services. City Attorney Pishko added that past city analyses consistently show that average apartment units do not generate enough revenue to cover their service costs, reinforcing the need to revisit this issue.

Councilman McGee proposed an analysis of a series of recently approved development projects to perform a specific fiscal impact analysis for Norfolk, noting such a study had not been done in some time.

City Manager Roberts supported taking a couple of sample developments." He reiterated that housing doesn't pay for itself, a statement builders dislike but one that can often be disproven when looking at the net fiscal impact. He acknowledged that denser developments can be more efficient to serve in terms of infrastructure like roads and fire protection, but this is often outweighed by the costs of schooling, human services, and public safety, which are driven by household income. City Attorney Pishko added that while a police visit to an apartment might be more efficient, there are higher calls in low-income apartments than in other areas. This led City Manager Roberts to declare household income as "the variable that is most likely to drive the cost of services."

City Attorney Pishko then provided a broader fiscal context, reminding the group that local real estate taxes are only a fraction of the city's budget. With a state appropriation of \$500 million and additional federal funds, the city's budget just breaks even. Those outside sources cannot be eliminated and provide services at the current level, estimating the budget would be cut by 40-50%. He acknowledged the development community's opposition to this narrative but stood by the results of past studies.

Councilman Clanton shifted the focus from fiscal balance sheets to human investment. He brought up the St. Paul's redevelopment, where residents in former public housing are now in a new structure with vouchers, but their rent contribution remains at 30% of their income. He stressed the importance of the "People First" initiative, which invests in residents to foster upward mobility. He reiterated that the long-term goal is to invest in people to create mobility. He argued that any discussion of costs must include the long-term strategy for helping individuals increase and support the tax base.

City Attorney Pishko agreed with the importance of this investment but introduced a critical concern from the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). He noted that HUD fears the St. Paul's redevelopment may have re-concentrated poverty, which could undermine efforts to help residents. He stated that the amount of low income units that are in the redeveloped Tidewater Gardens is not as good as it could have been.

Councilman Clanton countered that this is where the community action side comes in, focusing on job training, certifications, and attracting new employment to the area. He acknowledged the significant investment already made but looked toward the future, asking how to strategically use millions of dollars in locked-up project funds after 2027 to change the landscape of individuals and reduce the level of poverty. He shared insights from a visit to Austin, Texas, where a mixed-income

development on former municipal land successfully integrated market-rate and subsidized housing. He saw it as a model Norfolk could follow to support a diverse workforce and reduce commuting challenges.

Dr. Perry then addressed the second research topic: housing's impact on education. Her team found that stable housing improves school performance, while instability—such as evictions or frequent moves—disrupts learning and resource planning. Access to high-performing schools is often limited by housing affordability and segregation.

City Attorney Pishko noted that in Norfolk, lower-performing schools receive more funding, but experts argue that money alone doesn't guarantee better outcomes. Councilman Clanton identified teacher recruitment as a major challenge, which Director Perry linked to housing instability's effect on school operations.

City Manager Roberts emphasized that concentrated poverty undermines educational success, regardless of funding. City Attorney Pishko added that increasing low-income housing could further strain public schools, raising a key policy question for the commission.

The discussion then shifted to housing affordability for middle-income professionals, especially teachers. Commissioner Napolitano asked how to address this issue. Councilman Clanton stressed the need for affordable housing within the city to attract and retain qualified educators, noting that many now live in surrounding areas due to high housing costs. He cited a missed opportunity on a past development project that could have supported this goal.

City Attorney Pishko explained that the city once offered free land on 43rd Street for affordable housing aimed at professionals, but no developers pursued it—suggesting land cost wasn't the main barrier. He also cited data showing that over 80% of Norfolk's housing qualifies as affordable under state guidelines, indicating that simply adding more affordable units may not address professional housing needs or educational challenges.

City Manager Roberts shifted the focus to policy solutions, highlighting a study recommendation to prioritize affordable housing near high-performing schools. He promoted the Landlord Incentive program, which encourages voucher acceptance as a way to reduce poverty concentration and improve school access.

Director Perry outlined major challenges in housing development. Labor costs have surged 21% since 2020 due to a skilled worker shortage, and higher interest rates have made financing more difficult. A key issue is that construction costs now often exceed property appraisals, forcing developers to take on more risk. Coastal cities like Norfolk face added pressure from regulatory complexity, retiring tradespeople, and competition for labor from large infrastructure projects.

Director Perry proposed focusing on small-scale infill and "Missing Middle" housing, such as duplexes and triplexes on vacant city-owned land. She also recommended supporting local developers and workforce development, highlighting a training initiative and inviting attendees to a real estate financing event at ODU. Councilman McGee expressed frustration that despite planning efforts, Missing Middle housing hasn't materialized. He called for direct input from developers to understand the barriers.

A debate followed over the definition of Missing Middle housing. City Attorney Pishko described it as small apartment buildings, while City Manager Roberts emphasized form and neighborhood integration. Councilman Clanton expanded the concept to include ownership options like condos and townhomes, arguing for flexibility based on community needs. City Attorney Pishko cautioned

against redefining the term, but Councilman Clanton maintained that policy should adapt to local context.

Councilman McGee reiterated support for Missing Middle as an alternative to large apartment complexes and requested data and developer feedback. Commissioner Fraley noted long-standing community resistance to change, stressing that diverse housing doesn't harm property values and that public education is needed to shift mindsets. He emphasized that the housing crisis affects all income levels, including professionals.

Commissioner Houchins pointed to the city's internal processes, noting that making it easier for developers to work with Norfolk is essential to achieving housing goals. Commissioner Napolitano emphasized the importance of focusing on issues within the commission's control.

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

Following Dr. Perry's presentation, Councilman McGee then transitioned the meeting to next steps, including subcommittees and assignments.

Councilman Clanton reintroduced the previously proposed subcommittee structure, noting that some members had missed the initial discussion. He stressed that regular meetings don't allow enough time for in-depth work and supported forming smaller groups to focus on key issues. He also referenced earlier suggestions about involving external experts, such as developers, to guide the commission's efforts.

Councilman Clanton outlined the three originally proposed subcommittees:

1. Existing Policy and Data
2. Development, Preservation, and Finance
3. Equity and Community Engagement

Councilman Clanton linked earlier discussions to the proposed subcommittees, highlighting zoning as relevant for one group and community education for another. He emphasized the urgency of forming these groups, with commission members leading and staff support. Public interest was noted, with seven applications already submitted.

Councilman McGee asked for feedback on the subcommittee model, recalling prior debate about its structure. Councilman Clanton explained the goal was to gather targeted input before February, allowing the full commission to make informed decisions. He acknowledged the timeline was ambitious but necessary to maintain momentum. He estimated each subcommittee would meet once a month and suggested involving developers and educators.

Commissioner Napolitano expressed interest in the finance-focused group. However, discussion shifted to whether all three proposed subcommittees were needed. Councilman McGee and Houchins noted that Dr. Perry's presentation had already addressed much of the first group's scope. This led to a consensus to move forward with just two subcommittees.

Several members, including Commissioners Scott, Fraley, and Houchins, as well as Director Pierce, volunteered to participate. Councilman Clanton confirmed the revised structure, with the first subcommittee deemed unnecessary due to existing information.

The commission agreed to consolidate the proposed three subcommittees into two:

1. Development, Preservation, and Finance
2. Equity and Community Engagement

Commissioner Fred Napolitano volunteered to address development, Commissioner Deborah Stearns for preservation, and Commissioner Vilma Corbin for Finance in the first subcommittee. Commissioner Simon Scott, Commissioner Earl Fraley, and Commissioner Georgette Houchins will participate in Equity and Community Engagement.

Councilman Clanton concluded this portion of the discussion by noting they would follow up regarding any potential support needed for the subcommittees.

IV. CONCLUDING REMARKS AND ROUND ROBIN

Councilman McGee initiated closing remarks. Commissioner Fraley encouraged colleagues to read a book on Missing Middle housing, noting its accessibility and relevance. He expressed concern over the stigma surrounding the term “affordable housing,” emphasizing that housing challenges affect a broad range of incomes. He also referenced the National League of Cities’ Housing Supply Accelerator, to which the commission already has access.

Commissioner Napolitano briefly commented on teacher salaries and housing, while Commissioners Houchins and Scott also shared final thoughts. Scott acknowledged missing the previous meeting and noted a personal knowledge gap, but expressed commitment to learning and contributing meaningfully.

In response, Councilman McGee asked if Scott had suggestions for future topics or speakers. Scott said he would follow up and noted he had to leave by 5:30, prompting the meeting’s conclusion.

Councilman McGee thanked everyone for a productive discussion.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:35 pm.

Next Meeting:

Monday, November 17, 2025, at 4:00 p.m.

Norfolk City Hall – 10th floor Council Conference Room