Pennsylvania Senate Majority Policy Committee
February 18, 2026 – Penn State Fayette

Chairman Argall, Senator Stefano, and members of the Committee — thank you for the opportunity to speak today.

My name is **Robert W. Sleighter, P.E.** I am the founder and President of Sleighter Design, a Pennsylvania Licensed Engineering and Architecture firm established in 1995. I am a graduate of **Pennsylvania State University** and the **University of Pittsburgh**, and for the past 31 years my firm has designed housing developments, adaptive reuse projects, and public infrastructure throughout Southwestern Pennsylvania.

We currently work with 13 Pennsylvania Public Housing Authorities representing more than 20,000 apartment units. I also serve on the Fayette County Housing Task Force and Fay Penn's Housing Committee.

I would like to focus my comments on two issues that are significantly limiting housing production in Pennsylvania — particularly in rural counties like Fayette:

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1. The Regulatory Climate

Housing is not failing because there is no interest in building it.
It is failing because the process is too long, too expensive, and too uncertain.

In Pennsylvania, each municipality has its own zoning ordinance, subdivision regulations, stormwater standards, and review procedures. A single housing project can require:

- Zoning approvals
- Land development approvals
- Erosion and sediment control permits
- Stormwater permits
- Wetland delineations
- Stream crossing permits
- Sewage planning modules
- DEP approvals
- Utility authority approvals
- PennDOT permits

Each one carries separate fees, consultants, timelines, and risk.

Before a developer even knows whether a project is viable, they may spend hundreds of thousands of dollars on engineering, environmental studies, and legal work — just to determine if the project is "go" or "no-go."

That level of front-end risk discourages investment.

Let me give you a real example.

We recently worked with a client who purchased a vacant school building in Southwestern Pennsylvania. The building generated zero tax revenue. The developer proposed to invest $11 million to convert it into modern apartments.

That is private capital, job creation, housing supply, and tax base growth.

Instead of coordinated support, the project faced standard timelines, fragmented reviews, and no accommodation for strict financing deadlines tied to tax credits and funding cycles.

The project eventually moved forward — but only because the developer absorbed delay risk that many would not.

If we are serious about addressing housing supply, we must streamline and coordinate the regulatory process. In rural counties, we are not dealing with overdevelopment. We are struggling to produce enough quality housing to support workforce growth.

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2. Infrastructure Costs

Even after clearing regulatory hurdles, infrastructure costs often eliminate feasibility.

The reality is this: developers generally do not make their profit on the lot. They hope to break even on land development and earn their margin on the home construction.

But infrastructure costs can easily add $60,000 to $100,000 per lot before a foundation is ever poured.

When you combine:

- Road construction

- Stormwater systems
- Water and sewer tap fees
- Gas, electric, and broadband connections

The math becomes very difficult — especially in counties with lower housing price ceilings like Fayette.

Utility tap fees alone can add thousands — sometimes tens of thousands — per unit. When stacked together, these costs push homes beyond affordability thresholds and simply stop projects from happening.

Solutions

There are practical solutions.

First, we need statutory review timelines and coordinated permitting — similar to approaches used in states like **Texas** and **Florida** — so developers have predictability and certainty.

Second, the Commonwealth should provide model zoning templates and by-right housing overlays to reduce municipal inconsistency.

Third, we need infrastructure partnership programs — including tap fee assistance, state matching funds, and revolving infrastructure grants — to lower upfront development costs.

Finally, adaptive reuse projects — like vacant schools and industrial buildings — should receive expedited review. These projects are often the fastest path to adding housing in older communities.

Closing

Housing development is not the problem. It is part of the solution to workforce growth, economic stability, and community revitalization.

We need predictability.
We need coordination.
And we need partnership on infrastructure.

If we modernize our regulatory framework and reduce unnecessary cost barriers, housing production will follow.

I stand ready to assist this Committee and the General Assembly in crafting practical reforms. My firm works in these systems every day. We see what works — and what does not.

Thank you, and I would be happy to answer any questions.