

Welcome to Fayette County and thank you for hosting this Senate Policy Committee hearing on housing in our beautiful region. I would be remiss if I did not invite you to return as visitors to experience the state's largest park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site at Frank Lloyd Wright's Fallingwater, our historical sites dating to the French and Indian War, and the opportunity to explore all the outdoor amenities Fayette County has to offer.

Housing is a critical component of Fayette County's growth strategy. In 2023, updated in 2025, the Fay-Penn Economic Development Council commissioned a Fayette County Housing Needs Assessment. While a wealth of data was compiled, several key points deserve special attention. You can access the full assessment here:

[Fayette County Housing Needs Assessment](<https://www.faypenn.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/Fayette-County-PA-23-230-Housing-Needs-Assessment-Revised-6-25.pdf>).

The needs assessment reports that 15,000 people commute into Fayette County for work. The architect of the study, Bowen National Research, indicated that typically 20% to 40% of these commuters would prefer to live closer to their workplace. However, the occupancy rate of rental properties in Fayette County, across all price points, stands at 99.6%. While this is excellent news for landlords, it does not bode well for those looking to relocate. Available homes for sale comprise just 0.7% of the total housing stock. Many of these homes are older and require extensive renovations or are located in less desirable neighborhoods. Additionally, some homes significantly exceed what the average citizen of Fayette County can afford.

Using the lower estimate of 20% from Bowen's findings, Fayette County has an immediate need for approximately 3,000 housing units, both for ownership and rental, across all price points. By simply increasing the stock of affordable housing, the county could begin to rebuild its population and enhance our workforce.

However, several barriers to this goal exist. The median listing price of a family home (three bedrooms, two bathrooms) in Fayette County currently stands at \$289,000. While household income has been rising, Fayette County still lags behind national averages. Proof of the affordability gap is indicated by the median sales price of a home of \$170,000. Conversations with builders reveal that the cost of constructing a new three-bedroom, two-bathroom home starts at a minimum of \$260,000, not including the lot. Consequently, affordability is a major hurdle for most homebuyers in the county.

There are options available to assist homebuyers. Fayette County recently met with the Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency (PHFA), where discussions included their down payment assistance program. Private banks also offer similar assistance programs. Additional resources in Fayette County include Threshold Housing Development, a non-profit organization established to help low- to moderate-income families build homes that are partially subsidized through the USDA. Homeowners in this program contribute sweat

equity, working on building not only on their homes but also on those of their neighbors. To date, Threshold has built approximately 150 homes and rehabilitated an additional 150. These programs need funded and promoted.

The recent Beesontown Homes project in Uniontown introduced new infill housing, including 11 single-family homes and two multi-family buildings that together house 52 apartments. Phase one of the Campbell Estates project in Connellsville has been completed and includes 32 housing units for which over 400 applicants competed. Phase two is planned, and the Fayette County Housing Authority is seeking tax credit financing through the PHFA. These programs for low-income housing are now largely fully occupied.

Employers considering expansion or relocation to Fayette County often cite the lack of available housing as a barrier to attracting a potential workforce. One employer tried to extend their recruitment radius but was unsuccessful due to insufficient housing options. Today, housing is a vital aspect of economic development. Fayette County is currently engaged in an economic development visioning and marketing plan that includes a housing component, and a housing task force has been initiated under the direction of Fay-Penn.

The data suggests and confirms that housing demand exists.

While the challenges are significant, I would like to propose potential solutions. Fayette County has landowners willing to develop new housing projects. However, the substantial cost of converting raw land into buildable lots with the necessary infrastructure is a deterrent, as is the lengthy permitting process and the anticipated time to sell the lots. Fayette County is suggesting two possible options to aid development.

The first option is the implementation of Tax Increment Financing (TIF). This program permits a municipality to secure bond financing to cover a developer's infrastructure costs. The bond would be repaid through the property taxes generated by the new homeowners. Approval from the taxing authorities, including school districts, municipalities, and counties, is required.

The second option involves a state-level initiative similar to the Building in Our Sites (BIOS) program, which currently offers grants and loans for industrial site development. We propose adapting this program for residential infrastructure development to simplify administration and enhance user-friendliness.

Thank you for considering these important issues as we work to enhance housing availability across the state and here in Fayette County.