

2025

HOUSING RESEARCH COLLABORATIVE SUMMARY



DIMENSIONS
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Provided by Dimensions Consulting LLC

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Executive Summary

The purpose of the Collaborative is to support a community-driven effort to understand the state of housing in Summit County, identify needs, establish priorities, and develop actionable recommendations.

The Housing Research Collaborative is an initiative to identify the driving forces behind housing challenges, and to generate recommendations for action and improvement from the community. The Collaborative formed a Steering Committee to guide the work, and then invited community participation through a series of facilitated listening sessions. The Steering Committee and other community partners synthesized the results from the listening sessions, and has begun to prioritize recommended solutions and actions.

Three common themes emerged from all the conversations and activities that occurred during the spring of 2025. The common themes, presented below as calls to action, may help Summit County leaders visualize a better future and identify specific steps they can take to achieve their goals.

Strengthen education and communication systems



Map and share processes and paths to success in creative, dynamic, culturally relevant ways to help community members find greater success.

Build coordinated, cross-sector partnerships



The complex, cross-sector nature of this challenge requires a coordinated, collaborative, solutions-focused approach that leverages the talents and resources of the entire community.

Commit to bold, systemic leadership



Community leaders can address underlying systems rather than symptoms, championing strategic policies and investments that promote long-term security for the region.

Background Information

About the Housing Research Collaborative

Summit County Executive Ilene Shapiro and Summit County Land Bank Executive Director Patrick Bravo formed the Collaborative to understand the complex housing challenges facing residents of Summit County, Ohio. Similar to challenges across Ohio and throughout the United States, Summit County residents are struggling to find or keep affordable housing.

A cross-sector steering committee of stakeholders with a vested interest in housing and housing stability provided direction and guidance on the Collaborative's aims and activities.

Housing Context

Across Ohio, communities experiencing population decline are struggling to find developers and skilled workers to maintain or expand housing stock, while in other areas, the demand for new and existing housing is outpacing the supply each year. These trends limit availability and contribute to rising housing costs in the state.

Available and affordable rental housing is becoming increasingly rare. The median rate for a two-bedroom apartment in Summit County has risen by 40% in six years, from the pre-pandemic level of \$868 per month to the current rate of \$1,218 per month.

The number and rate of people experiencing homelessness or who are unsheltered in Summit County has risen dramatically in recent years, yet there has not been a corresponding increase in shelter bed capacity.

Interest rates on a 30-year fixed interest mortgage have more than doubled from their all-time low of 2.65% in 2021.

From nearly every perspective, housing options are becoming more scarce and less affordable. A community-wide effort was needed to research and understand the dynamics of such a broad challenge.

Purposes and Processes

Steering Committee Formation



Steering Committee members have interests and perspectives that represent many housing-related issues and challenges in the community. Committee members participated in regular meetings and engaged in conversations to guide the Collaborative's actions and inform decisions.

Steering Committee Members

Richard Bancroft, Home Builders Association of Portage and Summit Counties
Mar-quetta Boddie, Boddie & Associates Consulting
Constance Bozeman, Summit County Public Health, Lived Experience Advocate
Patrick Bravo, Summit County Land Bank
Rachel Bridenstine, Development Finance Authority/Western Reserve Community Fund
Mike Cassidy, Summit County Fiscal Office
Michael Harhager, Coalition on Homelessness & Housing in Ohio, Lived Experience Advocate
Latoya Harris, County Executive's Office
Herman Hill, Akron Metropolitan Housing Authority
Greta Johnson, County Executive's Office
Kyle Julien, City of Akron
Tanya Kahl, United Way of Summit and Medina Counties
Cory Kendrick, Summit County Public Health
Steven McGarrity, Community Legal Aid
Jamie McMillen, Akron Cleveland Association of REALTORS
Bambi Miller, Community Advocate
Holly Miller, County Executive's Office
Shana Miller, Summit County Continuum of Care
Lori Pesci, County Executive's Office
Malinda Sampsell, United Way of Summit and Medina Counties
Joseph Scalise, United Way of Summit and Medina Counties
Tamala Skipper, Fair Housing Contact Service
Peggy Szalay, City of Cuyahoga Falls
Helen Tomic, City of Akron
Aimee Wade, Summit County Alcohol, Drug Addiction and Mental Health Services Board
Jeff Wilhite, Summit County Council Member-District 4
Heather Yannayon, Summit County Job and Family Services

Purposes and Processes

Listening Session Topics



Listening sessions focused on specific topics to give participants time and space to discuss what was most important to them during each session. The topics were:



- Low-income housing, evictions and foreclosures
- First-time home buyers
- Hazards, hazardous living conditions and zoning
- Funders, funding and public policy
- Public safety
- Specialized populations and needs
- Homelessness

Listening sessions were held on March 12 and 26, April 16 and 30, and May 7, 2025. More than 200 people participated in at least one listening session throughout the spring.

Listening Session Format

Sessions followed a format that encouraged participants to engage with each other and collaborate. Each session consisted of three parts: brainstorming programs and services already in place; identifying persistent challenges and gaps that contribute to housing issues; and proposing and prioritizing solutions. More than 300 specific recommendations emerged from the listening sessions, and more than 120 recommendations were endorsed by multiple participants.*

Listening Session Concepts and Themes

Four concepts emerged as opportunities for improvement from the listening sessions.

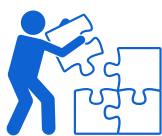
- There are processes, challenges, and paths to success that can be mapped and shared to help individuals navigating through or operating within succeed.
- Governments, institutions, and organizations can develop collaborative, cross-system processes and implement thoughtful, deliberate, and agile policies to increase access, safety, quality, and affordability.
- Service providers can enhance responsive supports for individuals experiencing crises to reduce potential long-term, housing-related impacts.
- Governments, institutions, and organizations must increase capacity to respond quickly to immediate housing crises with less disruption to systems and individuals.

The four concepts for improvement pointed to three general themes: education and communication, cross-sector partnerships, and systemic leadership.

*All recommendations collected through the research process are available in other summary documents.

Purposes and Processes

Strategic Synthesis Participation



Steering Committee members and other community partners were invited to participate in a strategic synthesis work session to review, evaluate, and recommend proposed solutions from the listening sessions. Around 30 people attended the strategic synthesis.

Strategic Synthesis Process



Participants worked in small groups to review all the recommendations from one specific listening session topic. On average, each small group evaluated around 40 specific listening session recommendations. Recommendations were evaluated based on three criteria: feasibility, impact, and sustainability.



After reviewing all recommendations, small group members built consensus around five community recommendations from their listening session topic that were the most feasible, impactful, and sustainable. Each small group then proposed their recommendations in greater detail to rest of the strategic synthesis participants; 35 solutions were proposed in total.



Finally, participants voted for the five most feasible, impactful, and sustainable proposals, ranking their choices from highest to lowest. The most frequently chosen and highest endorsed proposals are summarized below.*

Encourage and expand use of the rent escrow process, empowering tenants to be more proactive.	Lead strategic collaboration efforts between municipalities, nonprofits, and others to pursue shared goals and systemic change.	Develop educational programming to increase personal finance awareness among young adults.
Form a work group of municipalities to recommend clean, consistent zoning codes and form-based zoning.	Support home repair and remodeling using endowment funds; work in partnership with training programs to encourage interest in skilled trades.	Develop and publicize a database of properties with code violations so that people seeking housing can make informed decisions.
Allow homeowners and local property owners to access access low-interest loans from their paid property taxes	Investigate and recommend a county-wide sustainable revenue source to directly address the housing crisis	Encourage deeper, more consistent and strategic use of the Unite Us platform across government, housing, and social service providers.

*All recommendations collected through the research process are available in other summary documents.

Summary & Recommendations

Between Steering Committee activities, community listening sessions and the strategic synthesis, more than 250 people contributed insights and ideas to the Summit County Housing Research Collaborative. Each person and organization brought their own lived experiences and perspectives to the process. Nearly every recommendation that emerged from the Collaborative aligns with one of three general themes.

STRENGTHEN EDUCATION AND COMMUNICATION SYSTEMS

Gaps in awareness, access, and understanding create barriers for those who need the most support. Current housing resources and communication channels often fail to reach their intended audiences, especially members of vulnerable populations. Mapping pathways and sharing knowledge through accessible, culturally responsive formats can ensure everyone has the information needed to navigate housing systems successfully.

BUILD COORDINATED, CROSS-SECTOR PARTNERSHIPS

Housing challenges require unified action across sectors. While numerous agencies and nonprofits address housing issues, fragmented efforts limit collective impact. Adopting a collaborative framework that aligns government agencies, institutions, and community organizations around shared goals will enable more strategic, responsive policies and practices. This coordinated approach can accelerate progress on housing access, safety, quality, and affordability across Summit County.

COMMIT TO BOLD, SYSTEMIC LEADERSHIP

Rising housing costs are creating widespread challenges for many residents, businesses, and community organizations. These deep-rooted issues require comprehensive solutions that address underlying systems rather than symptoms. Community leaders should champion strategic policies and investments that stabilize housing markets and promote long-term stability. Sustained, coordinated leadership is essential to addressing and overcoming these challenges.