

# Summit County Housing Research Collaborative

Listening Sessions:  
Themes, Questions and  
Recommendations

## **Low income housing, eviction and foreclosures**

**Theme:** Tenant Education and Support

**Guiding Question:** How can we improve education and access to resources and supports specifically for low-income tenants so they can more successfully navigate housing issues and overcome barriers and challenges?

### **Community Recommendations:**

- **Provide more, and more accessible, education on all aspects of renting and ownership (i.e., explaining tenant rights and responsibilities, building and living within a budget, navigating application processes and understanding fees, reading and understanding lease agreements, learning about credit scores). Materials should be created at a 5th grade reading level, in multiple languages.**
- Provide resource packets to be distributed when individuals begin the housing application process, with eviction notices, or when they are forced from their homes.
- Connect tenants with advocacy organizations that are available to provide services.
- Build or promote a system for people to search for affordable, available rental units.
- Provide rent incentives to encourage people to take advantage of educational opportunities or resources (e.g., \$100 voucher/credit for attending certain trainings or a series of trainings).
- Develop proactive education and support programs to reduce the number of people who will need support in the future (i.e., proactive > reactive).
- Investigate and eliminate scams on the county housing website.
- **Increase the number of housing liaisons/navigators**
- Provide information with rent applicator or case writer software.
- Distribute housing information and resources at or through other support service agencies and providers.
- Include renters' resource education as part of work requirements for government benefits.
- Increase the use of the Unite Us coordinated referral technology platform to address housing challenges.
- Develop a registry or certification process for tenants who meet certain criteria or who complete education programs (e.g., *ready to rent*, *mature tenancy*). This recommendation includes the certificate of qualification for housing contained in the Ohio Revised Code (Section 2953.26).
- Assist more tenants with the rent escrow process through providers such as legal aid.
- For families with young children who are subject to eviction and are unable to maintain housing where they are, develop a meaningful support/triage system (including an organized community-based collaboration among existing providers) designed to help them locate and secure alternative housing.

## Low income housing and eviction

**Theme:** Landlord/Property Owner Education and Support

**Guiding Question:** How can we clearly communicate expectations and hold landlords and property owners accountable, so that everyone knows and plays by the same rules? Also, how can we encourage more local property ownership?

### Community Recommendations

- Create clear guidance for landlords regarding requirements for property upkeep, delineating responsibilities between landlord and occupant, and outlining enforcement codes/consequences. Create a document/landing page for initial communication with new landlords (rights, responsibilities, processes).
- Provide opportunities for landlords to learn how to nurture and build tenant/landlord relationships (e.g., tips to keep your tenant engaged, paying on time, and caring for the property).
- Develop a public reporting system of landlord and property owner certifications or credentials to indicate individuals or companies that participate in required or enhanced education and training.
- Develop a centralized database where landlords can access regulations, expectations, and documents across municipalities.
- Coach landlords (e.g., through a government liaison or peer coach) on their responsibilities and hold them accountable.
- Provide support for or possibly incentivize local landlords and investors so that we have more local investment and a better stock of quality properties (e.g., attending in-person training sessions increases eligibility for grants or tax incentives).
- Follow through on rent/registration (?)
- Conduct more (or more frequent) *wellness checks* on rental properties and landlords or property managers
- **Rent reduction for landlords that don't make needed repairs (e.g., rent escrow model).**

## **Low income housing and eviction**

**Theme:** Systematic Support and Collaboration

**Guiding Question:** How can we make community-wide efforts among funders, agencies and others that work with low-income individuals and families more centralized, coordinated, and collaborative?

### **Community Recommendations:**

- We recommend a centralized banking system to track rent payments to prevent tenants from evictions (i.e., a broadly used rent escrow system where rent payments are submitted and recorded before being distributed to landlords/property owners, and where payments may be withheld if properties do not meet standards).
- Develop more (or stronger) cross sector partnerships so that everyone working in the low-income housing space has access to the same information. This may include quarterly meetings where providers can stay up to date with information, challenges, and expectations.
- Form a community working group to make recommendations for adjustments to services, policies, or processes. This may also include conducting regular stakeholder meetings to better understand current tenant experiences.
- Maintain and protect existing federal and state funding; explore additional funding opportunities that already exist.
- Provide educational opportunities/updates for funders about local housing issues. Develop collaborative funding approaches among local agencies, philanthropy, and governmental departments that can respond to individual or large-scale needs.
- Create a centralized system/database regarding funding opportunities.
- Provide technical assistance to agencies that are navigating program cuts.
- Increase access to and use of the Unite Us referral platform.
- Build a system that helps contractors and repair workers communicate and collaborate more effectively.

## Low-income housing and eviction

**Theme:** Housing Costs

**Guiding question:** What local policies and incentives could we implement to try and manage some of the rising costs facing **everyone** associated with housing issues, from tenants, landlords and property owners to developers, builders and support agencies?

### Community Recommendations:

- Pass legislation (local and state) to cap application fees and other general fees.
- **Establish financial incentives for landlords and developers to work with low- or no-income tenants (e.g., low interest loans, tax credits).**
- Consider some sort of rent control so that we don't increase rents so fast that tenants are forced out of their homes.
- Build in affordability in tax incentives.
- Increase or modify the Akron property tax abatement to incentivize builders to construct housing and multi-unit buildings for lower income individuals.
- **Build on landlord mitigation fund models to include local funds that enable landlords and property owners access to funds for necessary repairs. This may reduce the concern that some may raise rents in anticipation of needed repairs.**
- **Establish community support funds that low-income homeowners can access for repair assistance.**
- **Conduct economic surveys. Investigate the increased costs in rent when property owners contract with rental agencies. Explore rent caps.**
- **Investigate Application fees and discrimination associated with some programs. Limiting "hands-off" computer programs and relying on local landlords/lessors may have benefits.**
- Develop more formal ways to recognize shared housing situations to benefit individuals and families (i.e., multiple people may be contributing to housing costs, but only one person may be getting the benefit in their credit history/score).
- **Implement a sales tax to support low-income housing initiatives.**
- **Limiting eviction filings on credit reports/records until the actual eviction occurs.**

## **First Time Homebuyers**

**Theme:** Education and access to resources

**Guiding Question:** How can we improve education and access to resources and support for first-time home buyers (*or potential buyers*) so they can avoid future barriers and challenges or overcome existing barriers and challenges before, during and after the home-buying process?

### **Community Recommendations**

- **Offer expanded maintenance classes (e.g., Habitat for Humanity's "Hands-on" training) for new homebuyers. Consider coupling this with expanded home-care tool access (e.g., a tool library). This way, home owners who borrow tools also know how to use them and return them safely.**
- **Create, publish, and distribute a "roadmap" guide to "stacking" multiple programs and resources (e.g., if you qualify for X you may also qualify for Y, If you are seeking support from Agency Q you may also find Agency M has resources you need).**
- **Increase knowledge about credit scores/reports (e.g. surprise collections), debt-to-income ratio, and basic household budgeting.**
- **Starting financial literacy in high school**
- Track CRA lender reporting on outcomes of education classes
- Create tools and resources to help interested homebuyers determine if buying a home is viable, or to help them create a pathway to home ownership.
- **Develop (or find) and then widely distribute a "Home Buying for Dummies" book. This may leverage an existing home buyer guide from Akron-Cleveland realtors.**
- **Partner with schools, libraries, the Job Center, Banks, government offices and Churches to provide greater access to culturally-responsive learning opportunities and resources for individuals and families who may be interested in owning their first home soon or in the future.**
- **Leverage digital media and the Internet to reach (social media, Google, ads, etc.)**
- Incentives for employers to provide a living wage or bonuses to first time homebuyers
- Opportunities for those getting governmental benefits to set aside dedicated savings for down payments that would not impact qualifying for those benefits
- Widely promote or even incentivize use of Ohio's bank housing savings plan.

## **First Time Homebuyers**

**Theme:** Lender and Institutional Practices

**Guiding Question:** How could or should lenders act in partnership with first-time home buyers to make processes more accessible and flexible, especially for those whose earlier life experiences may limit their access to traditional homeownership?

### **Community Recommendations**

- **Expand and enhance existing rent-to-own programs or “sweat equity” loans for buyers willing to take on home repairs or rehabilitation and commit to living in the home for at least three years.**
- **Lenders reassess criteria for determining credit worthiness (e.g., history of consistent rent payment). Consider additional accommodations for student loan debt.**
- **Develop a mentorship/case manager model for prospective homebuyers that can offer support and guidance from the initial stages through the first year of ownership, accessed through local real estate agencies or local lenders. This strategy may also incorporate the establishment or expansion and promotion of a network of loan officers throughout the county.**
- **Develop incentives for lenders to work with first-time homebuyers, especially those who demonstrate they have simplified and streamlined the home buying process. Publish a list of local lenders who make a commitment to simplifying processes and supporting first-time home buyers. This may also include some sort of certification system for lenders (e.g., *first-time homebuyer friendly lender*).**
- **Restore, expand upon, or enhance and streamline the housing voucher program to increase and expedite access to housing for low- or no-income individuals and families.**
- **Establish or enhance a community-based lending tree model to increase access to owning one’s first home.**
- **Provide training for lenders and frontline staff on implicit bias, culturally-responsive practices, local community context and history.**
- **Partner more closely with legal aid for home buyers who need assistance with past or current circumstances.**

## **First Time Homebuyers**

**Theme:** Local Policies to Improve Existing Systems and Infrastructure

**Guiding Question:** How can local policies be streamlined and simplified to create incentives (make things easier for) developers, builders, and first-time home buyers and to enforce rules and expectations?

### **Community Recommendations:**

- **Form a working group of existing elected officials, government employees, developers, builders, architects, and realtors to review and recommend revisions to existing policies, fees, regulations and processes. This could include streamlining systems, passing legislation or updating zoning regulations to allow construction on nonconforming lots, the creation of a pre-approved book of plans, new or updated laws for bad foreclosure investors, the creation of short-term renting regulations, or zoning changes to allow for tiny homes or higher density housing.**
- **Create tax abatement zones to encourage purchases, renovations, or new construction in strategic geographic locations**
- **Enforce timelines for the completion of projects, assess fees when projects fail to meet timelines and reinvest the fees into local property projects.**
- Allow local government to have resources to enforce maintenance codes and then hold locals responsible for enforcement
- **Lobby the state for a permanent state housing tax credit.**
- Create a first time home buyer tax credit or tax incentive.
- Create a pool of local investors dedicated to Summit County projects. Develop a community-based investment pool that can compete with outside investors for the purchase of rental properties in the community with the understanding that the properties purchased will be offered at affordable rental rates.
- **Encourage foreclosure houses and land to be sold to existing residences and infill developers with local experience.**
- Improve consistency and efficiency in home evaluations.
- Provide incentives to help developers and builders with infrastructure costs.



## First Time Homebuyers

**Theme:** Local Policies to Address Rising Costs

**Guiding Question:** What local policies and support could we implement to try and manage some of the rising costs facing everyone associated with housing issues, from lenders, developers and builders to first-time home buyers and early homeowners facing maintenance and repair costs?

### Community Recommendations:

- **Subsidize mortgage payments or property taxes when major repairs are needed. This can also include low-interest or forgivable home equity loans for first-time home buyers who must make major repairs to their homes and who commit to remaining in the home for at least 3 years after repairs are completed. An extension of this recommendation may include assisting people with major allergies or disabilities in making needed repairs to their homes.**
- **Tap into available tax credits**
- Expand, enhance, and support networks of community gardens and tool loan programs. This may also include the warehousing of reclaimed or excess building materials and supplies from developers and contractors (e.g., a half-sheet of drywall that might otherwise be discarded could save a first-time homeowner money if contractors had a place to drop it off that residents could access).
- Provide workshops and other digital resources on financial management of costs and/or planning and completing personal home repair projects. This may also include assigning mentors to first-time home buyers in specific locations or under specific conditions, so that each buyer knows they can access a more knowledgeable peer/guide who will help them navigate the challenges of owning a home.
- Underwrite home warranties and insurance programs for first-time home buyers.
- Encourage or require point-of-sale inspections that could include estimates of costs to restore or repair any home being purchased by a first-time home buyer.
- **Establish a penny sales tax to fund grants for owner-occupied home repairs**
- When first-time home buyers make their down payments, establish an escrow account that can be used for future repairs.
- **Create incentives for employers to allow money to come out of paychecks and be set aside for down payments or home repairs.**
- **Create a tiered system for property taxes based on property values and household income (i.e., progressive property taxation).**
- **Train more workers in the building and construction trades**
- **Consider rezoning to allow accessory dwelling units**
- **Land trust**
- **Regulations or incentives to limit property flipping and out of state investors.**
- **Revise rules for program qualifications**
- For reducing the impact and the susceptibility of the community to high rent fluctuations, developing one or more homeownership purchase/support/maintenance models as part of a specific, targeted community-based strategy using homeownership as a means to stabilize housing costs in the community.

## **Hazards, Hazardous Living Conditions and Zoning**

**Theme:** Official Policies and Enforcement

**Guiding Question:** How can local policies be streamlined and simplified to create incentives that encourage local property owners and landlords to understand and adhere to expectations? How can we more strictly and efficiently enforce existing rules for all property owners and landlords?

### **Community Recommendations:**

- Hire additional personnel (inspectors) for increased enforcement of zoning violations, especially violations among real estate owners/investors. This may be an investment that pays dividends in the future (i.e., fees may offset the additional personnel costs).
- Expand and enhance training on regulations and expectations, and on the consequences of violating these rules. Proactively reach out to registered landlords to educate them on key guidelines and policies to be aware of, or changes to existing guidelines and policies.
- Review and update municipal zoning master plans more regularly. This recommendation may also include a collaborative project to align zoning master plans across municipalities when possible and productive.
- Enhance and expand outreach to tenants to explain tenants rights and to let them know about official resources they can access to help express concerns or deal with unsafe conditions.
- Enforce higher fines for code violations and establish more consistent enforcement of violations for noncompliance among landlords and property owners. Direct the additional funds collected from these fines to a public fund or to property in need of remediation, leveraging the existing Summit County Housing Trust Fund infrastructure. Incorporate (in some way) existing infractions and/or a history of infractions into the kind and quality of grant and/or loan access and eligibility considerations (e.g., limited access to grants for property owners with known infractions; direct grant funds to address immediate concerns raised through an inspection that pose a risk to multiple tenants; performance loan that turns into a grant if property maintained for specified period of time without further infractions and/or increases in rent; etc.).
- Form a collaborative workgroup across municipalities and the county to review and revise existing policies, guidelines, and practices that may contribute to racial, cultural, or economic discrimination.
- Establish a public database of properties (especially multi-unit structures) with code violations. Improve technology for reporting and tracking homes with code violations to protect potential buyers or renters.
- Public housing authority to enforce vouchers and who lives in home - who signs codes of conduct.
- Bring together a structured community reinvestment collaborative effort among the banks with respect to offering low-interest loans designed to address the rehabilitation and repair needs of lower income homeowners and rental properties in more economically disadvantaged neighborhoods.

## Hazards, Hazardous Living Conditions and Zoning

**Theme:** Resident Awareness and Education

**Guiding Question:** How can we increase residents' and tenants' awareness of their rights and responsibilities and general housing rules and policies so that more people can live in safe housing conditions?

### Community Recommendations:

- Expand the use of the Unite Us digital referral platform to connect home buyers and renters with coaches or service providers who can help them navigate the complex (and often overwhelming) processes around voicing concerns or seeking remediation.
- Expand and enhance education about housing maintenance and upkeep. Many renters believe they have little/no responsibility for any home maintenance, which can lead to significant deterioration before problems are known to property managers or cities. Many homeowners lack the knowledge, skills, or resources to adequately maintain their homes, especially aging homes.
- Be more creative and proactive in the government's approach to educating renters and homeowners. This may include online videos and/or gamifying education around a renter's bill of rights around hazards and resources, incentivizing parents to attend seminars or engage in other learning experiences by offering additional resources to those who attend, mandating participation in educational programs as a requirement for participation in certain programs or a prerequisite for certain resources, or increasing awareness about credit scores, bankruptcy, or eviction. This recommendation would also include outreach and education around lead and mold in homes and steps to address/remediate.
- Redefine the role of zoning code inspectors and enforcers as neighborhood ambassadors who are members of the community to provide education and support beyond simply appearing when issues occur (i.e., a community policing model).
- All housing inspections should be completed by city or county employees and funded by registration fees.
- Form a working group to increase communication and collaboration between and among housing support agencies and government, which could include the sharing of police and fire reports with housing advocates and city/county zoning personnel.
- Digitize, enhance, and improve processes for tenants to voice complaints about living conditions, and for the government to follow-up with tenants around zoning or safety issues and concerns (e.g., ability to text complaints and receive updates and results).
- More public disclosure of a landlord's properties (i.e., quantity, location, existing violations)
- Greater enforcement of Section 8 compliance
- Explanation & standardization of housing qualities
- **At point of transaction/sale, provide Ohio Revised Code and local ordinance to owners, tenants, and property managers about housing rights and governance.**
- Pass legislation to require public posting of renters'/tenants' rights posters in high traffic areas of two or more units (e.g., workers' rights posters in workplaces).
- Expand or improve on the periodic interior and exterior inspections of major housing systems and communicate results with tenants and the public.

## **Hazards, Hazardous Living Conditions and Zoning**

**Theme:** Relationships and Communication

**Guiding Question:** How can we improve relationships and communication between property owners, tenants, homeowners, and others to create a greater sense of belonging and community? How can we put the “neighbor” back in neighborhood?

### **Community Recommendations:**

- Investigate and support inexpensive, tactical urbanism and pedestrian improvements, favoring affordable implementation methods over expensive studies to make changes and unify the community.
- Provide pamphlets and coupons to new neighborhood members to encourage investment in and engagement with local businesses and neighborhood activities.
- Build neighborhoods back and community strengths - greater sense of community within/between neighborhoods from investors.
- Introduce or expand grants for block parties and other community events to bring people together.
- Establish and support proactive communication among individuals and groups with different perspectives and shared interests (e.g., property owners and residents, residents and property managers, municipalities and owners, municipalities and residents, municipalities and property managers).
- Establish a simple, accessible system for reporting neighborhood issues that is confidential and safe.
- Encourage policing strategies that emphasize protecting the most vulnerable residents.
- Establish funds and grants to rehab housing stock or beautify public spaces, which could be collective, community-wide projects or support for individual projects.
- Establish or maintain free meeting spaces for public, nonprofit and for profit use.
- Expand investment in walkable infrastructure, such as sidewalks and bike lanes.
- **Create or offer additional support for grassroots neighborhood organizations, such as block watches or other social organizations that promote interaction and community.**

## **Hazards, Hazardous Living Conditions and Zoning**

**Theme:** Agile Allocation of Funding and Resources

**Guiding Question:** How can we allocate existing funding and financial resources in smarter, streamlined, targeted ways to create safer, more livable homes and communities quickly, rather than investing in long, expensive development plans that may never be implemented?

### **Community Recommendations:**

- What if agreements could be made between municipalities and contractors to offer discounts or more reasonable pricing for emergency home repairs? Perhaps contractors would be willing to offer lower rates if there were a guaranteed flow of work. Emergency repairs typically cost more, and those are often times when homeowners or renters have the least available funds.
- Increase and integrate the role of philanthropy to more directly address housing issues.
- Let safety and zoning experts play a greater role in making decisions on where to allocate funds to have the greatest impact.
- Seek and secure more local, state and federal funding.
- Tear down unsafe homes to create buildable lots, then incentivize local investment in low-income rental properties or affordable housing.
- Reduce and standardize setback requirements for neighborhoods and cities. These requirements can often vary from block to block in some municipalities.
- Legalize all legal, non-conforming housing (e.g., single homes/duplexes/apartments are no longer legal to town zoning, making them vulnerable to being unmaintained or neglected).
- Incentivize investment in in-fill as opposed to new developments.
- Consider a sales tax to fund the Summit County Housing Trust Fund
- Provide grants to cities and townships to create and implement upzoning of properties and neighborhoods.
- Establish collaborative, working planning commission across municipalities that encourages improvement of the county's largest commercial hubs, regardless of geographic location.

## Funders, Funding and Policy

**Theme:** Accessibility and Affordability

**Guiding Question:** What systemic, large-scale solutions or changes can we implement to address some of the issues that limit access to and availability of housing? (i.e., laws, rules, policies, and standards of practice that could make housing more accessible and affordable, including financing and zoning)

### Community Recommendations:

- **Advocate for additional state and local funds, working in partnership with state and local elected representatives.**
- **Expand on what works and tax credits.**
- Fair housing protections.
- **Establish funds to support appraisal gap financing programs in targeted neighborhoods and communities. Increase low-interest gap financing for housing development and rehab.**
- **Investigate and encourage the implementation of form-based zoning codes to expand housing options beyond single family homes. This recommendation also includes simplifying existing zoning and building codes to provide flexible solutions and more efficient processes, and the pattern book development approach.**
- **Expand investment in and promotion of workforce development programs to assist people in finding sustainable careers that pay a living wage.**
- **Provide businesses with incentives for increasing wages and supplying additional employee benefits. Ensure that wages are high enough across the board to tolerate natural economic and housing cost fluctuations:**
- **Implement a savings program that directly focuses on scaling for housing costs (e.g., a 401k-type program without age limitations on withdrawals for housing costs).**
- We recommend that you increase marketing and funding of the county trust fund and increase the cap.
- Spearhead the simplification and uniformity of rental assistance guidelines and thresholds.
- **Develop or support a more coordinated approach between agencies. This aligns with a recommendation in low-income housing that reads: *Develop more (or stronger) cross sector partnerships so that everyone working in the low-income housing space has access to the same information. This may include quarterly meetings where providers can stay up to date with information, challenges, and expectations.***
- Expand a child-tax credit for families with children.

## Funders, Funding and Policy

**Theme:** Historical Personal and Social Barriers

**Guiding Question:** How can we help individuals and families avoid or overcome some of the historical personal and social barriers to housing access? (i.e., personalized supports around debt, credit scores and credit history, stigma and bias)

### Community Recommendations:

- Allow for and/or encourage eviction expungement.
- **Streamline and expand credit score repairing processes and services.**
- **Multisector, collective partnerships to facilitate workshops/education for home ownership and financial opportunities.**
- Expand and concentrate community development investments in historically disinvested communities including their infrastructure, parks and other public spaces, and local business development.
- Speak and publish materials in plain language. Remove or move lingo, acronyms, or legal language. Explain, support, and advocate with residents throughout processes.
- **Intervene early and increase awareness using existing resources (e.g., UWSM financial empowerment center for credit issues and education).**
- Lending capital should reflect holistic value of the home
- **Review and revise home appraisal policies and practices to reduce or eliminate biases (e.g., appraiser biases around race, neighborhood, seller or buyer age).**
- Investigate the possibilities and potentials of a universal basic income model for County residents.
- Increase access to capital with fewer strings attached (e.g., some home buyers avoid banks with restrictive requirements on loans).
- Educate and encourage social responsibility and culturally responsive practices among real estate agents and other professionals working in housing (e.g., fair housing, mustard seed).

## Funders, Funding and Policy

**Theme:** Accessing Resources for Immediate Needs and Goals

**Guiding Question:** How can we help individuals and families, property owners and potential property owners access additional financial resources to combat the significant costs associated with every aspect of housing? (i.e., ways to put actual money into pockets to support immediate access and action)

### Community Recommendations:

- *All recommendations collected for this theme and guiding question are addressed in recommendations from other themes, guiding questions, and general topics.*

## Funders, Funding and Policy

**Theme:** Property Owner Relationships

**Guiding Question:** How can we use funding to improve relationships between property owners and tenants so that more people can have a safer, more peaceful housing experience? (i.e., ways to improve relationships and incentivize good behavior from everyone)

### Community Recommendations:

- Find a way to eliminate the worst practices of owners who treat it as just an investment; if not regulation, at least disincentives. Provide subsidies or other incentives for local property owners who act in good faith partnership with communities and tenants.
- Enhance support for providers of quality housing. Subsidize property upgrades so they do not lead to rent increases. Share best practices with landlords. Seek opportunities that may exist through OHFA for additional funds or incentives.
- **Limit the number of homes out of state investors can buy:**
- **Enhance or expand support for tenant unions**
- **Enhance, expand, or promote the services of mediators to resolve problems between landlords and tenants.**
- **Require local property managers for all rental units.**
- Develop, enhance, or expand education and support those associated with housing issues. This may include budgeting classes for tenants, translation services, immigrant-specific training for landlords and tenants, boilerplate examples of fair lease agreements, home upkeep education for tenants and landlords, funding for security cameras for accountability, coordinated security patrols, or the creation of standard orientation programs or community groups for tenants and landlords.
- Provide financial incentives to tenants with records of good behavior (e.g., reduced rent) and landlords with records of positive, responsive relationships (e.g., reduced fees).
- Create a communication portal for landlords and tenants across the county, to include access to lease expectations and rights/responsibilities of landlords and tenants.
- **Provide grants, low interest loans, or other incentives for property owners with positive ratings and records to encourage the expansion and continued investment in their businesses.**



## Public Safety

**Theme:** Addressing Issues Around Unsheltered /Unhoused

**Guiding Question:** What specific short or long-term steps can we take to address issues surrounding unsheltered and unhoused individuals and families and other impacted residents?

### Community Recommendations:

- Make day shelters available, regardless of weather conditions.
- Expand mental health resources directed toward the unhoused.
- Establish a “lost and found” after a camp is swept so people don’t permanently lose their belongings.
- Create a formally designated, sanctioned space with utilities for people who are experiencing homelessness, or who are unhoused by choice or circumstance.
- Expand training and educational opportunities to help law enforcement, businesses, individuals, and organizations better understand the challenges and dynamics of homelessness, and how to safely and effectively work with people who are experiencing homelessness, or who are unhoused by choice or circumstance.
- Build or buy enough housing to house (not warehouse) those who want it (e.g., tiny homes, tiny or renovated hotel space).
- **Eliminate wait lists for shelter beds (e.g., increase shelter beds), increase supportive housing that includes on-site medical, mental health, and addiction services, and expand access to low-barrier housing (that can withstand destructive behavior).**
- Increase availability of and access to low-income and subsidized housing.
- Be cognizant of people with pets in shelters
- **Work in partnership with all communities across the County to provide education around the need to provide housing opportunities for people experiencing homelessness. Seek creative ways to expand housing opportunities for people experiencing homelessness.**
- Develop a focused help center to provide information and resources for people experiencing homelessness.
- **Train and deploy community-based navigators who can help people experiencing homelessness locate alternative housing, particularly for situations like evictions. Use the Akron Municipal Court housing court and mediator as a model to expand throughout Summit County.**
- Expand the availability of housing for individuals leaving incarceration.

## Public Safety

**Theme:** Extending Support after Official Support Ends

**Guiding Question:** How can we provide additional or enhanced supports for clients whose official relationship with service providers has ended and who are now “on their own” and facing housing challenges?

### Community Recommendations:

- Promote the expanded use of the Unite Us referral technology platform.
- **Create, expand or enhance mentoring programs so that older adults with similar lived experiences can provide guidance and support. This recommendation could also include the creation of a phone tree where volunteers or other trained personnel would reach out to these individuals at certain intervals and connect them with more knowledgeable service providers when needed.**
- Improve and standardize information around available programs that may be able to provide assistance.
- **Improve collaboration across organizations. *This recommendation is more thoroughly captured in recommendations made in the low-income housing listening session.***
- **Reconsider the financial incentives and opportunities of the current system.**
- Ensure that, once grants have been awarded, their associated funds are delivered according to an established timeline.
- Expand philanthropic investments in housing programs.
- **Provide information and resources to places where homeless people visit often so they can take information with them.**
- Enhance support and funding for nonprofits that already exist and are working in this space (e.g., Continuum of Care, homeless charity).
- Working in partnership with law enforcement and other social service agencies, investigate the issue of adult children being evicted by their parents and explore ways to support those individuals when it happens.
- Require government programs to “encourage” organizations that they fund to have a plan to help transition individuals leaving their programs.

## Public Safety

**Theme:** Unsafe Housing Conditions

**Guiding Question:** How can we address unsafe housing conditions that have a ripple effect, impacting potential tenants, tenants, residents, neighbors or neighborhoods, and the community?

### Community Recommendations:

- Looking at other ways to improve quality of life in the community.
- Ensure more timely or effective enforcement of rental property codes and increase accountability for landlords who maintain unsafe housing.
- Be more proactive about demolishing unsafe spaces: \*\*
- Support the creation or expansion of neighborhood watches or similar programs.
- **Develop public service announcements regarding 311 to report neighborhood issues.**
- Prioritize and increase support for home repair, and advertise family resources for individuals with hoarding tendencies.
- Build on current housing programs to improve housing stock.
- **Require out of state landlords to have local management and oversight.**
- Establish uniform regulations to make housing safe and livable (beyond current AMHA regulations).
- Increase education on tenants rights (captured more thoroughly in other listening sessions).
- Establish and promote standardized lease language for landlords and tenants, which include tenant protections.
- Enhance and expand the use of escrow rent practices.
- Implement or enforce consequences for failure to comply with housing standards.
- Increase the overall number of building inspectors.
- **Develop better law enforcement and neighborhood coalitions in high crime areas.**
- Encourage increased involvement of churches in neighborhoods.
- Make sure rent prices charged match housing conditions and safety through inspection and regulation.

## Public Safety

**Theme:** Funding and Awareness Challenges

**Guiding Question:** How can we overcome some of the funding, education, and awareness challenges that exist for programs and/or individuals who don't know the rules and expectations, or whom to contact or what to do regarding unsafe/unfair housing?

### Community Recommendations:

- Communicate impending homelessness to HOT team at CSS to intercede before loss of housing occurs
- **Identify one organization to create and distribute annually updated resource guides to local service agencies-similar to the “Street Guide”. Make it specific to cover services for special populations (elderly, youth, veterans etc). Make it ubiquitous. Use social media to distribute widely. Provide this resource in public spaces such as libraries, courts, community centers, and schools.**
- Education on Generalized Intake at 211
- Provide access to short-term housing (hotel, medical shelter) during transition to more stable housing and then provide a liaison or a peer mentor to assist the person through the processes and transitions.
- Establish a “Housing Hub” (a virtual and/or physical location) with people/liaisons who can be a resource for people experiencing unsafe or unfair housing situations.
- More specialized dockets in court system
- Create and fund a billboard/metro bus campaign in Summit County to provide awareness and direct people to specific websites, phone numbers, or resources where they can voice concerns.
- Create a fund/stimulus to encourage housing repair of unsafe/unfair housing in response to tenant concerns, especially when landlords commit to working cooperatively with tenants and inspectors to rectify the situation. *This recommendation is addressed more thoroughly in recommendations from the hazards and zoning listening session.*

## **Specialized Populations**

**Theme:** Directed Funding

**Guiding Question:** How can we make funding decisions specifically directed at supporting members of special populations who face multiple barriers to housing or homeownership?

### **Community Recommendations:**

- **Develop a series of recommendations for funders and investors to incentivize investment and living in areas and neighborhoods with high need and high opportunity.**
- **Conduct a comprehensive, county-wide housing audit, which would include a market rate housing analysis, a county wide analysis of the level of need and types of available housing, a county wide cost/benefit analysis of housing related funding, an analysis of housing regulations across systems that either promote or inhibit funding collaborations. Then, armed with that information and insights, develop a housing plan for the next 5 years to address what is currently available and what new developments are needed to meet specific population needs. Finally, set funding priorities and create shared pooled funding systems to achieve the goals of this plan, with specific focus on meeting the needs of special populations.**
- **Map out the rental assistance process and then simplify it to make it easier for tenants to navigate.**
- Implement incentives for the development of affordable housing (using tax credits to lower taxes) and for programs that help people maintain housing or enter housing for the first time. This recommendation was more thoroughly explored in listening sessions dedicated to low-income housing and first-time home buyers.
- Enhance awareness among governments, organizations and individuals around existing or potential funding opportunities to address the needs of specific populations that face additional barriers to housing.
- Increase funding and support for affordable translation services to help residents who do not speak English access services and communicate with property owners.
- Expand access to home ownership for immigrant families that arrive in our community with no credit history.
- **Provide funding and a system to underwrite loans for individuals with specific barriers to housing and credit resources. Reducing or eliminating risks for lenders may increase access to loans.**

## **Specialized Populations**

**Theme:** Resources for Immediate Needs and Crises

**Guiding Question:** How can we quickly direct resources and supports to those facing immediate housing challenges or who are in the middle of or just recovering from crises that will likely affect their housing?

### **Community Recommendations:**

- **Reinstate AMHA's mainstream voucher.**
- Increase the number of low-barrier shelters/beds/transitional housing considering populations' particular needs.
- **Repurpose old hotels and other spaces for short-term, crisis-intervention housing. Include facility oversight and safety/security services.**
- Increase the number and availability of case managers and peer assistants to help people navigate housing processes and systems.
- Expand the availability of and access to emergency funds and other resources to help cover housing costs while people are experiencing other crises.
- Provide non-stipulated/less restrictive community housing rapid response funds that nonprofit providers can access to help with intake, connect residents with resources and get them "housing ready."
- Develop and encourage the use of a single assessment all providers could use that can identify needs and recommend related services.
- Provide free, efficient WIFI throughout the county.

## Specialized Populations

**Theme:** Stigma and social/cultural barriers

**Guiding Question:** How can we address the multiple stigmas and social or cultural barriers that members of specialized groups face, especially as they seek housing?

### Community Recommendations:

- Enhance and expand access to least restrictive/supportive, inclusive communities.
- Encourage the development of more mixed housing options.
- **Develop and deploy educational programming to help community leaders learn more about stigmas, barriers (zoning), resources, and the economic value of inclusion.**
- **Cities and counties need to work together and involve in local policy and law (landlords, management companies and property owners)**
- **Create systems and processes to ensure that at least one person with lived experience has a voice in and authority around recommendations and decisions affecting others with similar lived experiences.**
- **Provide education and advocacy around best practices for working with members of special groups, which would include empowering members of these populations with a voice and some authority in decisions, increasing resources to address language barriers, assessing community needs for specific language and cultural sensitivity, and using technologies to assist with language translation.**
- **Increase and enforce consequences for landlords that rent unsafe properties.**
- Offer expanded literacy programs.
- Limit immediate internet access to eviction filing records and history.
- Increase accountability for fair housing, including issues of race, disability status, sex, and quality of housing.
- **Enhance and expand availability of housing advocates.**
- Expand half-way housing options for residents entering the community after incarceration to help them get more established and find stability before needing to seek housing.
- Create incentives or grants to property owners who want to update or remodel their properties if they commit to renting to members of stigmatized groups.

## Specialized Populations

**Theme:** Access and Awareness of Resources and Rights

**Guiding Question:** How can we increase access to and awareness of the existing resources and rights members of specialized populations could be taking advantage of if they knew or could access them?

### Community Recommendations:

- Create and offer workshops highlighting the resources available to specialized populations, such as working with legal aid organizations on tenant rights\*\*\*\*
- **Increase the number of and access to social workers/community health workers/liaisons to connect and guide people to resources**
- Expand the use of existing educational programs and resources, such as the landlord/tenant class or program developed by HUD
- **Develop a comprehensive communication plan focused on informing everyone (landlords, potential buyers/renters, and the general public) about the rights and resources available to special populations in terms of access to affordable housing. This should include all of the typical communication channels (e.g., social media, bus signs, billboards, pamphlets, gathering places, schools, churches, agencies, affiliated organizations, advocacy organizations, community event presence) promoting success stories of people accessing trusted services and resources.**
- Conduct an analysis in partnership with Metro to ensure alignment between public transportation and access to housing, particularly for members of specialized populations who may already face additional barriers to housing.
- **Organize periodic partner meetings (to share and collaborate) targeting organizations and agencies focusing on special populations and/or housing. *This recommendation is presented more thoroughly in recommendations from the low-income and foreclosures listening session.***



## **Specialized Populations**

**Theme:** Cumbersome, Inefficient Rules and Processes

**Guiding Question:** What can we do to help members of specialized groups navigate the many cumbersome and inefficient rules and processes associated with the housing system? Or, what cumbersome and inefficient rules could be eliminated?

### **Community Recommendations:**

- **Encourage and facilitate communication among agencies and organizations**
- **Simplify the language/formatting on paperwork needed to be completed.**
- *More local regulation*
- Start a county-wide landlord engagement team to seek feedback from landlords and to offer training and consistent communications
- **Promote greater awareness of UniteUs:**
- Engage University of Akron law students to assist in expungement of records which hinder access to housing
- **Create at least one special housing site for individuals who have a particular criminal record e.g. drugs or sexual assault are not eligible for public housing**
- **Develop preventative plans for youth to have housing before they are in a housing crisis or homeless**
- **Provide access to UW financial empowerment centers for needed financial literacy training for people facing housing challenges**
- Empower agencies which work with immigrant/refugee populations to assist establishing a credit history and to access a state ID
- **Regulate the length of visible eviction records so it isn't a lifetime challenge and correct wrongfully filed evictions records**

## **Unsheltered and Unhoused**

**Theme:** Basic Needs and Survival

**Guiding Question:** How can we improve access to food, water, clothing, restrooms, personal care, and weather protection?

### Community Recommendations:

- **Open and staff “Outreach Centers” at strategic areas in the community that provide shelter, help with basic needs for survival.**
- Create a gift card system for people who age out of foster care (i.e. 18-24), and as such, are ineligible for other assistance
- Establish (more) mobile food units. Could we engage food trucks to donate 1x per month etc and in return the food truck vendor would receive some sort of tax relief or other incentive
- Offer survival packs of clothing and personal care products at the food bank for food distribution centers to hand out.
- Improve the availability of and access to community resources for veterans
- **Open emergency overnight shelters for more than just extreme cold and hot weather. i.e. hail, storms, tornados**
- Establish centers with 24/7 access to all basic needs at or near local hospitals

## Unsheltered and Unhoused

**Theme:** Safety and Sanitation

**Guiding Question:** How can we improve personal safety, safe places to sleep, safety from violence or theft, clean spaces and neighborhoods, and access to trash disposal, showers and restrooms?

### Community Recommendations:

- **Develop and provide organized safe sleep areas around the community for people choosing to be unsheltered**
- Dedicate and publicize specific hours, or make them available 24/7, at community centers for those experiencing homelessness to rest, clean up, etc.
- **Provide ongoing, free training (for security staff at shelters) on how to effectively work with people with mental health challenges.**
- **Engage volunteer organizations to create trash/litter pickup teams to periodically remove trash/litter in known, established areas of congregation, establish internal policing of encampment areas.**
- **Provide port-a-potties with sinks and flushable toilets in areas of need and encampments or engage organizations to open to let people use bathroom**
- Provide dumpsters at homeless encampments with regular pick up
- Provide a “campground” concept under controlled conditions
  - Temporary only
- ***Employ/establish large open air “lodges”-perhaps using underutilized space***
- Engage local community groups to make and distribute free laundry detergent (homemade is inexpensive)
- Have our health and housing inspectors visit encampment sites regularly, unobtrusively, to identify any safety or sanitation issues and identify solutions prior to closing down the site and evicting the unhoused.
- **Use empty retail space as a permanent mail spot for the unhoused and provide lock boxes, seating, general information and help guides for resumes, getting copies of documents, send/receive mail**
- **Create a neighborhood where persons experiencing homelessness could exchange their labor for rent.**

## **Unsheltered and Unhoused**

**Theme:** Shelter and Housing Options

**Guiding Question:** How can we improve access to emergency shelters, transitional housing or long-term housing options?

### **Community Recommendations:**

- **Repurpose unused school buildings and other unused public buildings into shelters**
- Provide better and more access to information regarding where available housing is located
- Work with landlords to decrease/stabilize rent - rents are too high
- **Work with prison and re-entry case managers or jail staff to connect returning citizens to the homeless hotline prior to release. \*\* There is a “re-entry” folder used by the state prison system that guides the soon to be released person through numerous things to consider and do before release. Housing should be included in this folder along with an education on the potential downsides of verbal temporary housing agreements with friends/family.**
- **Build a system to meet the great need to diversify the continuum of available housing so that the unhoused can get a start on home rental/ownership.**
- **Develop tiny home, self sufficient neighborhoods/ communities**
- **Create and advertise sanctioned, safe and clean areas for those living outdoors**
- Open and advertise daytime shelters that would be open from 8-5 or other specified hours and require people attend classes to help develop skills to live independently
- **Develop housing navigators to help find long term housing; assist with child care and transportation and rental application fees\***
- **Offer transitional/bridge housing for people experiencing sudden loss of housing**
- **Increase shelter beds available to meet the unsheltered needs of our community**
- **Inventory and possibly create/increase shelters providing medical respite**
- **Increase the capacity of Summit County Community Action to administer Home Energy Assistance Program. The current wait time is 12 weeks...longer than the time it takes to have utilities turned off**
- **Provide funding/tax incentives to encourage builders to renovate abandoned houses into permanent supportive housing**
- **Build additional permanent supportive housing using tax credit from Ohio Housing Finance Agency**
- **Increase the number of shelters/beds available for disabled and seniors that are ADA compliant as there are currently very few options.**

## **Unsheltered and Unhoused**

**Theme:** Respect and Relationships

**Guiding Question:** How can we improve treatment and relationships with police and other public safety officials, social workers, outreach teams, government offices, and housed neighbors?

### **Community Recommendations:**

- **Help establish open communication through round table meetings and lived experience discussions among the different groups. These could be offered in the community and within workplaces (e.g., lunch and learns).**
- **Universal sensitivity/cultural understanding training across large employers in the city. Similar to what UW used to provide through Bridges Out of Poverty.**
- **Incorporate a training module for law enforcement on how to effectively work with the unhoused, recognizing that there may be underlying challenges (substance abuse, abuse, mental health) leading to their unhoused circumstance.**
- **Engaging mental health professionals to be with law enforcement when engaging with unhoused individuals. Opening communication channels between first responders and health/mental health providers.**
- **Identify a couple of temporary housing options which accept pets. Or alternatively, a way to surrender your pet into a foster system where you can recover the pet within a set time (e.g. six months)**

## **Unsheltered and Unhoused**

**Theme:** Mental Health, Behavioral Health, and Health Supports

**Guiding Question:** How can we provide inclusive access to care without judgment, and harm reduction, crisis support, peer support, and medical care?

### **Community Recommendations:**

- **Create an information piece to better explain hoarding and how it can often lead to evictions and provide resources for landlords and family members to have an organized approach to addressing the situation before eviction**
- **Establish an additional, specialized shelter to support the severely mentally ill. It can be a drop in shelter and a place where law enforcement could bring an unhoused person rather than using the justice system.**
- **Increase access to low or no-cost mental health services**
- **Create mobile health clinics to serve the unhoused populations. Perhaps we could partner with other cities to reduce the costs.**
- **Create and execute a multichannel campaign to educate and help end the stigma surrounding mental illness, substance abuse, and homelessness**

## **Unsheltered and Unhoused**

**Theme:** Pathways Out of Homelessness, and Possibilities

**Guiding Question:** How can we help people move forward and access case managers, services and jobs that provide hope, stability and support?

### Community Recommendations:

- **Establish a program that would provide scheduled, advertised popup locations for access to social services and other information in high demand areas around the community**
- **Find a way to free up community health workers/case managers to not be dependent on Medicaid billing, enabling them to work with individuals regardless of diagnoses.**
- **Provide access to shelter aftercare services**
- Partner with temp agencies/employment services to work directly with shelters and agencies with rapid rehousing programs
- Provide supportive childcare services, especially for families with special needs children, perhaps by engaging with existing programs at Head Start or APS, or with employers open to providing childcare at their employment locations where unhoused people can be employed if their children were cared for
- **Provide more guidance, support and funding to obtain state I.D.'s which is a huge barrier to nearly everything else.**
- Provide training for frontline service providers so they can engage in culturally responsive practices with people experiencing homelessness