



## OHIO TOWNSHIP ASSOCIATION

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### House Bill 361, Regards Building Inspections, Local Regulations & Zoning House Local Government Committee March 18, 2026

Chairwoman King, Vice Chair Kishman, Ranking Member Sims, and members of the House Local Government committee, my name is Kyle Brooks, and I am the Director of Governmental Affairs for the Ohio Township Association (OTA). On behalf of Ohio's 1,308 townships, thank you for the opportunity to provide interested party testimony on HB 361 Regards Building Inspections, Local Regulations, and Zoning.

The OTA appreciates the intent to promote thoughtful planning, coordination, and accountability in land use decisions in Ohio. Townships share these objectives. The OTA strongly supports local control and believes that growth decisions should remain in the hands of township officials and residents who are best positioned to determine what is appropriate for their communities. Nonetheless, there are several provisions on which we would like to comment.

#### **Comprehensive Plans**

The legislation would require counties and townships with zoning to adopt or amend comprehensive plans to address specified goals, including fiscal responsibility, collaboration with neighboring jurisdictions and stakeholders, economic development, and housing needs. While we understand and appreciate these goals, we have concerns with the cost implications associated with requiring amendments to comprehensive plans.

Comprehensive plans serve as guiding documents for land use and zoning decisions within a community. However, amendments to these plans can be costly. In many cases, updates or revisions can range from \$10,000 to \$100,000 depending on the scope of work, the use of consultants, legal review, and any required studies.

Additionally, not all townships operate under complex zoning frameworks. Many townships maintain straightforward, limited zoning resolutions that reflect the size, character, and needs of their community. Imposing uniform comprehensive planning requirements on those townships may create unnecessary expense and administrative burden without providing meaningful benefit. For townships operating on limited budgets, these are not insignificant expenditures. Requiring additional elements or mandated updates to comprehensive plans, without flexibility or funding, will impose new financial burdens on townships that are already maximizing efficiency with limited resources.

The OTA respectfully asks the committee to consider language that preserves local flexibility in how comprehensive plans are developed and amended, and to ensure that any new requirements do not inadvertently create an unfunded mandate.

#### **Zoning Timelines**

The bill establishes defined timelines for zoning amendment hearings and decisions, including requiring zoning commissions to conclude hearings within 45 days and to issue recommendations within 20 days. The OTA supports the concept of clear and predictable timelines. However, it is critical that these timelines can be paused when necessary to ensure a complete and fair review process.

There are many instances where zoning applications are submitted incomplete or require additional documentation, revisions, or supplemental materials. Under a strict timeline that continues to run, a zoning commission could be forced into a position where it must deny an application solely because the applicant has not yet provided the necessary information, even if the application would otherwise meet all requirements for approval. This outcome is not beneficial to the applicant or the township. It may result in unnecessary denials, resubmissions, additional hearings, and increased costs for all parties involved, the opposite of the intent.

While the bill allows for an extension, it does so only with the agreement of the applicant. That structure does not fully address the issue. There must be clear authority for the zoning commission to pause the timeline when an application is incomplete or when additional information has been requested, rather than forcing a premature decision on an otherwise approvable project.

### **Zoning Commission Meetings and Records**

The bill requires zoning commissions to meet annually and to file their records with the board of county commissioners, and it specifies that zoning commission records are public records. The OTA supports the requirement for zoning commissions to meet annually. Regular meetings promote transparency, accountability, and engagement within the community. However, the OTA has concerns with the requirement that township zoning commission records be filed with the board of county commissioners. Township records should remain with the township. This provision is duplicative, as these records are already maintained locally and are subject to Ohio's public records laws. **The OTA respectfully requests that this provision be removed to preserve local control and avoid creating redundant requirements.**

### **Mandatory Zoning Requirement (Removed Provision)**

We would also like to thank the committee and the bill sponsors for removing the provision that would have required townships with populations over 5,000 to adopt zoning. Zoning is, and should remain, a local decision. In many townships, adopting zoning requires approval by the voters. A one-size-fits-all mandate raises significant legal and practical concerns, particularly in cases where residents may reject zoning at the ballot.

Additionally, in townships without zoning, property owners retain broad flexibility in land use. That is a policy choice made at the local level, and it reflects the will of the community. We appreciate the committee's recognition that this decision should remain in the hands of township residents and officials.

The OTA would like to thank Representatives Lorenz and Fischer for their work on this legislation, and the committee for its consideration of policies that will have an impact on townships and the residents they serve.

Thank you for considering our position. If you have any questions or concerns about our position, please do not hesitate to contact me at 614-863-0045.

Sincerely,



Kyle A. Brooks  
Director of Governmental Affairs