

Guernsey County Commissioners

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Good morning, Senator Reynolds and members of the House Select Committee on Housing.

I'm Guernsey County Commissioner, Dave Wilson, and I currently serve as Commission President. On behalf of my fellow Guernsey County Commissioners, Jack Marlin and Skip Gardner, as well as myself, I want to express our appreciation that this hearing is being held in an Appalachian Ohio county and that we have been provided an opportunity to lend our collective voice to the affordable housing issue.

When we're asked if our county is in need of low-income housing, middle-income housing, senior housing or even executive housing, the answer is all of the above.

We're fully aware that, regardless of the population or geographical location within the state of Ohio, other counties share the same needs. However, Appalachian counties face a unique set of over-powering hurdles that are challenging – if not impossible – to overcome.

In the case of Guernsey County, early 20th century coal mining has left a subsurface similar to Swiss cheese, resulting in an exponentially higher cost of site preparation for any significant construction project. This issue got national attention in 1995 when a portion of Interstate 70 pavement in Eastern Guernsey County collapsed due to mine subsidence. Adjusted for inflation, the cost of filling those voids in 2023 would total \$16.3 million.

A more up-to-date example is our recently completed power plant, the Guernsey Power Station. Site preparation – which included boring approximately 2,000 holes to fill abandoned mine shafts with grout as well as raising the site above flood plain – totaled \$25 million!

And, speaking of flood plain, flood-related issues are prevalent throughout Guernsey County.

The point of all of this is to illustrate the cost of site preparation for potential housing developments. What it does not illustrate is the property purchase price and the provision of infrastructure: roads, utilities, broadband and so on.

Smaller, rural Appalachian counties want and need this type of development, but we simply cannot match the financial resources available to Ohio's large metropolitan areas. As a result, we are seldom equipped to pursue funding from the State of Ohio in its current configuration. Unfortunately, this can be interpreted as a lack of interest whereas, in reality, it's a lack of resources.

To conclude, we, the Guernsey County Commissioners, thank you for allowing us the opportunity to explain some of the development obstacles we face. We urge you to absorb what you have heard today – and have yet to hear – and make the revisions necessary to improve access to housing-related funding for Ohio's Appalachian counties.

"Guernsey County - A rich heritage building a better tomorrow"

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