



November 27, 2023

Ms. Chloe Green
Ohio Senate Select Committee on Housing
FROM: Yellow Springs Village Council
RE: December 4, 2024 Hearing on Housing

Honorable Committee Members:

The Village of Yellow Springs appreciates your efforts in seeking community feedback regarding Ohio's housing needs. We are not able to send a representative to the December session in Marietta, Ohio. Therefore, please find the written testimony submitted below.

Yellow Springs is a rural village in Greene County in southwestern Ohio. It has a population of just over 3700. Over the last three decades the Village has experienced several trends that have impacted the economy and quality of community life, including the rising costs of housing.

Vernay Labs – a midsized industry whose employees made livable wages – closed its facilities two decades ago. The local economy has been replaced, in part, by tourism. Because the cost of housing has outpaced wages, those who work in the service sector frequently can't afford to live here. The impact of this on the community has been a decline in the number of young adults living in Yellow Springs. The drop in the number of young families who can't afford to live here has made maintaining our public schools difficult.

The Village is increasingly an aging community with a population whose median age is now 54 compared the median age in Ohio of 39.5. Currently, 58% of the village members are over 50 years of age.

Yellow Springs was once known as a racially diverse community with an African American population in the 1990s of 30%. However, its current African American population is just about 10%. The increasing cost of housing has been a major factor in our community's changing demographics.

At the national level, housing costs have increased disproportionately to household incomes. However, in places like Yellow Springs the impact has been even greater. During the last three decades Yellow Springs has become a very desirable place to live. It is a walkable and relatively safe, small community with excellent schools. The market forces of supply and demand have meant that housing costs have risen disproportionately to other communities in the area.

For most households, the cost of housing is the largest expense. Increased housing costs have had a disproportionately negative impact on moderate and lower-income households. It is for this reason that it has become harder for young adults and young families, minorities and elders on fixed-incomes to live in Yellow Springs. For a town that prides itself on being a welcoming diverse community, it is disturbing that young adults can't find a place to live and multi-generational seniors on fixed incomes have to move away. The decreased population of



working adults has impacted income tax revenue to the Yellow Springs Government – the major revenue stream for the Village. Should the Village be able to attract more small businesses, we lack suitable workforce housing for employees to live in.

The Village has attempted to grapple with the lack of housing affordable to moderate and lower-income households. In the late 1990s, two Village Council members assisted in the development of a nonprofit Community Development Corporation – Yellow Springs Home Inc. Home Inc. has worked diligently since then to create 40 housing units with 32 in the predevelopment stage. With a waiting list of 300 households, the need continues to surpass the organization’s ability to create housing. Inadequate housing development funding continues to be a challenge, especially for a small organization in a small community.

The Village commissioned a housing study in 2018 by Bowen National Research. That study indicated a need (at that time) for 500 new units: 200 market rate and 300 units for low and moderate-income households. Progress is being made on market-rate housing development. A new development in progress will provide 90 units. As a small rural community, it is very difficult for Yellow Springs to create housing affordable to the populations that desperately need it. The market does and will not provide this housing on its own.

Yellow Springs lacks funding streams, such as HOME funds, that are available to larger urban areas. While larger cities may be able to staff and fund housing development, this is just beyond the capacity for villages like Yellow Springs. Yet the need is just as great as in larger communities.

Safe, affordable, and accessible housing is a prime factor in household and family success. Successful families make successful communities and successful communities can make Ohio an example for other states. If Ohio’s rural communities are to thrive, they need increased support from the state and federal government to enable them to provide housing that the market will not. Ohio needs to treat housing as a critical infrastructure. We need the state to invest in housing just as it does for the business sector, transportation, energy, clean water, etc.

We propose that the State of Ohio make investments to ensure that our rural communities thrive by providing:

- Funds for rural communities to staff housing programs– for local governments and CDCs.
- Seed monies for rural communities to develop Affordable Housing Funds.
- Low or no-interest revolving loan funds for workforce and low-income housing developments and redevelopments in rural communities.
- Increased housing development funds for rural CDCs

Thank you for your consideration of, and attention to, this critical issue in our state.

Yellow Springs Village Council:

Kevin Stokes; Gavin DeVore Leonard
Carmen Brown; Marianne MacQueen; Brian Housh