

MINUTES OF THE MEETING

ATHENS MUNICIPAL-REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION

January 5, 2026

12:00 P.M.

CONFERENCE ROOM

ROLL CALL

MEMBERS PRESENT

Eric Newberry
Chairperson Jona Garrett
Jordan Curtis
Sam Stephens

MEMBERS ABSENT

John Proffitt
Frances Witt-McMahan

OTHERS ATTENDING

Anthony Casteel
Nora Cardin
Brandon Ainsworth
Tim Schultz
Josh Thurman
Porter Clark
Lisa Becker

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

1. Approval of December 29, 2025, work session minutes.

The minutes of the December 29, 2025, work session were approved on motion by Eric Newberry; seconded by Jordan Curtis; vote – unanimous.

2. Approval of December 1, 2025, regular minutes.

The minutes of the December 1, 2025, work session were approved on motion by Eric Newberry; seconded by Jordan Curtis; vote – unanimous.

OLD BUSINESS

There was no old business to discuss.

NEW BUSINESS

- 1. Public Comments and Final Plat approval for Porter Clark on property shown as Tax Map 056L Group A Parcels 038.00, 039.00 and 040.00 on the Tennessee Real Estate Property Assessment Data Website. The property is zoned B-3 Intensive Business District and R-2 Medium Density Residential and is located off Decatur Pike and the unopened Railroad Avenue Right of Way and contains 0.61 acres and three (3) lots.**

The Commission moved to deny the plat because it was not presented at the meeting as required

MOTION: Move to deny the plat.

MADE: Jordan Curtis

SECOND: Eric Newberry

VOTE: Unanimous

MOTION PASSES

2. Public Comments, review and recommendation concerning the possibility of adding Micro Brewery and Distilleries Use to the B-2 Central Business District and the B-3 Intensive Business District.

Mr. Casteel said MainStreet brought this to Council. They don't take anything back to Council until the Planning Commission looks at it. There is a lot more to this than just zoning. There is Municipal Code and fire stuff, which is the main issue. They did look at other cities that have this, but as said in the report, their main concern is safety. Currently, alcohol manufacturing only allowed in the I-2 District.

Mr. Casteel said all alcohol sales in this town are tied to food, even hotels or catering. They don't allow bars or just a place where you can just sell alcohol. That is another issue that will have to be taken up in Title 8 of the Beer Code. They would have to change that in order to address what they do in the zoning code.

There was some conversation about what the importance of that it has to be manufactured where you sell it. One person said they think it's just a visual display. You could have the apparatus' there and they are not activated and be manufactured somewhere else. They have to come up with the best regulation that fits Athens.

Someone asked if they had the projected tax revenue for the city and Mr. Casteel printed out a copy that was presented for them to see. He said he did not know how accurate the information was because they only submitted this information in December and with the holidays, they did not have time to just really confirm the information provided. They talked about tabling it so they can have time to look at everything further. It will give them time to look at it and digest it. According to MainStreet, they have someone from Knoxville who is looking at putting a brewery here. Right now, it is set up that you can only serve alcohol if food is served as well.

Mr. Newberry said they are only talking about a micro-brewery brewing beer. Those things are pretty popular. He thinks it is something they might want to look at because it provides a lot of foot traffic.

Mr. Casteel said they allow volatile uses downtown, and he is sure the international fire and building codes have mechanisms that would make this safe even in fire districts. They are not there to tell someone about their business model. They are here to protect the downtown and give the citizens of Athens what they want and what city council wants to do and do it in a safe manner.

Mrs. Becker said to answer the question on why not brew elsewhere in separate locations, it doubles the rent and the number of buildings they will need. If they can do it in one location, it gets a lot of appeal and saves money.

There was conversation about the foot traffic it will bring and the benefit to the other businesses.

There was mention of Sweetwater, Etowah, and Copperhill doing it.

Someone said obviously it opens up another can of worms with fire and the zoning code, but he did not think zoning should be an issue.

Chief Ainsworth said the brewing part is what raises questions about zoning.

Someone said zoning should not be the stonewall.

Mrs. Becker said all the code still needs to remain in place. They will meet all that, but do not let the zoning be the end of it.

Mr. Stephens said they definitely need further discussion and get Main Street there to expand on what they are talking about.

Mr. Casteel said if there is something they want looked into, just let him know. They will continue to look at this.

Mr. Newberry said if you are going to an ordinance, maybe look into only beer and non-hard alcohol installations.

Mr. Casteel said Bridget Roberts looked up that they would only allow brewed pubs, micro-brewery, tap room, craft, beverage production, maybe those kinds of definitions. One thing they all said in their comments is the foot traffic it will generate. The parking issue is where you are going to run into and issue. Where are you going to find a parcel that will offer that amount of parking? There are only so many parking spaces in the right-of-way and there are only so many uses the downtown area can handle. Parking is what is going to be an issue.

Someone asked about how many parking spaces there were at Market Park.

Mr. Casteel said he did not know they would have to ask Ben Burchfield, the Public Works Director. The zoning code is supposed to be off street parking.

Someone asked if there was a grant to expand downtown parking.

Mr. Casteel said there was a downtown plan, but it did not add additional parking. It took some parking spaces away. He said they did get some additional parking lanes around the courthouse. They did talk about having a parking garage. There has to be parking somewhere. It's doable, but it is going to take the City.

Someone said from the public they did not think there was parking problem downtown.

Mrs. Becker said once more revenue starts coming downtown there be an opportunity to create more parking spaces. They have to make it desirable for businesses to come here and then whatever comes up, then you deal with it. If they don't come, they will sit stagnant.

Mr. Newberry asked from a planning commission standpoint, all they can possibly do as action is make a motion and a second to recommend this to City Council.

Mr. Casteel said they can, but they need to be more specific about what they are recommending. There was discussion about Staff taking a look at other places that have these. They talked about looking into the cities that have these and what zoning they have them in.

Mr. Casteel said it has to been done concurrently for this to happen. They have to decide whether they want standalone alcohol businesses or they want to tie to food like they have done everything else.

Mr. Curtis said he views it as someone who wants to open a restaurant attached to it.

Mr. Casteel said it would then not be a micro-brewery by itself; it would be a restaurant with a micro-brewery and taproom. The restaurant would be the primary use.

Mrs. Becker asked if they could clarify primary verses secondary.

Mr. Newberry said it be perceived sales.

Mr. Casteel said 25% of total sales is alcohol and 75% of sales would be on food.

Mrs. Becker said that it would be too restrictive on a microbrewery. Your profit margin on alcohol and beer would be much higher.

Mr. Casteel said that is the way it is right now with Ruby Tuesday and Applebee's. He does not see making a concession for a microbrewery when they are no more important than those and other restaurants.

The was more discussion about obtaining information on microbreweries in other towns but there is not a lot of information out there on it.

Mrs. Cardin said other cities that have these might be considered in a downtown area, but they are not in places with businesses on each side. They are standalone buildings.

Mr. Newberry said if they are making a designation of shared verses standalone buildings, is it because of fire.

Chief Ainsworth said perhaps. There is language in the fire and building codes that they adopted they could enforce to take care of that such as separation walls and sprinkler systems. That kind of thing is going to be required anyway because the code says so. Their buildings are so old, and they also have to consider that they have people living above the buildings downtown. They have managed over the years as people remodel they are getting separation walls and sprinklers. The information from Main Street is vague and they do not have enough to go off, to see what the people want to do with a microbrewery.

Someone said they need to make Main Street do the legwork to find solutions.

Chief Ainsworth said the way they look at, is a blanket coverage, are they going to just come in and brew a couple of beers or are they planning to make liquor? They have no clue.

There was more discussion about the investment costs in the community.

Someone asked if there was a higher fire risk with a microbrewery than a restaurant.

Chief Ainsworth said yes, if they are brewing their alcohol. He does not know enough about these microbreweries because they just started looking at them. In the newly adopted 2021 fire and building code, there is a standalone chapter on brewing alcohol and spirits.

Someone said they think it would be a significant difference between beer and spirits.

Chief Ainsworth said it changes a lot if their alcohol content exceeds 16%. They have to look at as a whole picture because they have no idea what they plan to do. If it is beer, then it is a whole lot less. That is still classified as mixed use occupancy, so you are going to have a part that is considered storage, a part considered assembly as tap room, one part considered manufacturing, and mix use changes the course. He has heard people say Athens' codes are too strict. These things are not Athens' codes; they are fire and building codes that everyone is supposed to have.

There was further discussion on occupancy types and what code required where people have purchased buildings downtown.

It was agreed that they needed more information on this before making a decision on model zoning codes in cities that have zoning downtown

MOTION: To explore other cities that have microbreweries and see what areas of zoning they are in.

MADE: Eric Newberry

SECOND: Sam Stephens

VOTE: Unanimous

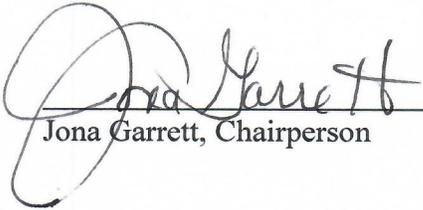
MOTION PASSES

PETITIONS AND REQUESTS FROM AUDIENCE

There were know petitions or requests from the audience.

STAFF REPORT

There was no staff report presented.



Jona Garrett, Chairperson



Frances Witt-McMahan, Secretary