



ATHENS COUNTY LAND REUTILIZATION CORPORATION
BOARD OF DIRECTORS – MINUTES
www.AthensCountyLandBank.com

LOCATION: Live meeting held at Athens County Commissioners' meeting room (live) with guests joining virtually on Google Meet (<http://meet.google.com/zsk-oegh-dkk>)

DAY/TIME: Called to order on Wednesday, July 22nd, 2026 @ 11:03 AM

PURPOSE: Special meeting to consider the following business:

Board Administration

1. The meeting was called to order by Taylor Sappington, Board Chair. Roll call by Aaron Dye, Secretary. Board members present were Taylor Sappington, Chris Chmiel, Lenny Eliason, Nathan Simons, and Meghan Jennings for Steve Patterson.
2. Motion to approve the agenda by Mr. Eliason, 2nd by Mr. Chmiel. All Yeas.

Business

1. Discussion, meeting, and consideration of a barn property on Route 377 in Bern Township (Parcel D010010019801)

During the June meeting, County Planner Connor LaVelle reviewed a situation involving land currently owned by The Nature Conservancy in Bern Township. The land was acquired as part of a wetland restoration project and to later be transferred to ODNR to become part of the Gifford State Forest. The community has expressed concern regarding the demolition of two barn structures on the parcel. The land bank could serve as a temporary holder while seeking a long-term solution.

Several concerns were noted by board members during the meeting and it was moved to request additional information and specifics from The Nature Conservancy regarding requirements, timelines, deed restrictions, and financial commitments from supporting organizations. Potential motions and action regarding the subject may occur following the discussion.

Athens County Planner Connor LaVelle reviewed the previous discussions regarding the property. He provided printed copies of letters of support from local and community organizations that were circulated via email. He notes that The Nature Conservancy

provided a list of initial long-term protection mechanisms that would be included with the property transfer and reviewed each item (attached to these minutes).

Tim Traxler of Ohio Hill Country Heritage Area was present and relayed that the organization's mission is to see that heritage is used as a foundation for economic improvement for southeastern Ohio. He continues heritage can be fragile and includes assets such as this barn. He notes that he sees this as an opportunity to do something and doesn't believe there is anything to lose by the land bank taking on this property.

Tom O'Grady of the Southeast Ohio History Center was in attendance and begins by noting that this region is "where Ohio began." He says that the natural and cultural heritage of our region are the greatest assets here today and tourism is one of the biggest growing industries and our buildings are our assets. He believes that preserving our buildings is critical. He continues that trees, hills, and barns are what makes Ohio routes scenic. He ends by noting that he would be happy to get involved to turn the barn into an asset rather than a liability and could partner if the building is used for program activities including exhibits or education as well as providing a venue at the Southeast Ohio History Center for fundraising events to help offset any costs associated with the barn maintenance.

Kate Kelley, President of the Athens Conservancy, also attended and began by noting that the Athens Conservancy is not the same as The Nature Conservancy, but they have a shared vision. She notes they were one of the organizations initially approached to acquire the property but they do not typically take on properties with structures. She continues that they would be delighted to be an active partner as the land bank has similar missions and values. Additionally, she says that they are interested in providing some support of the use of the barn including events that align with Ohio's heritage or history as well as the current activity that The Nature Conservancy is taking on regarding watershed protection. She concludes noting that despite the history of extraction in the area, southeast Ohio is unique in its green space.

Mr. LaVelle notes that The Nature Conservancy will provide the demolition funds that were initially set aside for use by the land bank should that become necessary.

Mr. Chmiel asks who the point person would be for this collaboration. Ms. Kelley responds that perhaps no one entity will take on the entire role, but individual roles could be taken on in the public benefit as it is an opportunity for collaboration that is new and would require some learning.

Mr. Eliason notes that the protection mechanisms provided by The Nature Conservancy seem more like lease terms. He asks if the ownership transfer would go to ODNR. Mr. LaVelle notes that the remaining property will be transferred to ODNR after the restoration, and if the barn would be torn down it would fall back into ODNR's ownership. Mr. Eliason responds that it would be more of an agreement term rather than a deed

restriction. He continues that the Friends of Ohio Barns letter of support says it is contingent on establishing a maintenance plan and that has been his primary objection, taking on maintenance of this property and how much the land bank could invest in it. It would fall into the land bank's purview not to make the barn an attractive nuisance or become a liability. He doesn't believe we have the wherewithal to maintain it and turn it into an exhibit space. He ends by noting that he understands the idea of preserving it, and that it is a very difficult decision.

Mr. Sappington asks about the existence of a long-term maintenance and reuse plan, as that would be the land banks' responsibility to draft. He likes the vision and idea, but doesn't know what the immediate needs are regarding maintenance. He is concerned that this will be a long-term project that we do not have the funds to make happen in 12 months. He would like to see a time restriction should the land bank acquire the property.

Mr. Traxler notes that Athens County might create a parks district in the future. In that case, taking on a property like this one may fit in. Maintenance and its use could fit into a park district's overall vision. He continues that the barn has many aspects of value and asset rather than just a liability, and this is an opportunity to take advantage of.

Mr. Chmiel asks if the transfer doesn't happen with the land bank, that the barn would just be torn down. It is noted that this is correct. Mr. Eliason notes if we have the demolition funds and a timeframe, it would be the land bank's decision to demolish the barn at any point in time and the funds would be available to do so. This could protect us from extreme maintenance costs. He asks what the current timeframe looks like regarding a decision being made about the property. Mr. LaVelle responds that he believes The Nature Conservancy is on an expedited timeframe as they are currently performing the restoration work. He continues that they would be doing the survey work and parcel separation work so it would be beneficial to have that completed before the restoration work is finished. Mr. Eliason asks if ODNR has agreed to accept the property if the land bank demolishes the barn. Mr. LaVelle notes that written confirmation has not been received, but currently they will accept the property from The Nature Conservancy if there are no structures on the property.

Mr. Simons asks what an acceptable period or timeline to hold the property would be. Mr. Chmiel responds that he would be willing to put one year into the role to help make some progress. He notes that Bob Eichenberg informed him that he would be willing to help organize a cleanup. There is a partial structure on the site falling down, but the barn is in good shape. He continues that this project as a pulloff would not be too different than what the county manages on Route 550.

Jody Barnes, Property Manager, asks who the end-user could be if the land bank sells the property. Aaron responds that it would need to be a government entity or a non-profit with aligned values and mission to The Nature Conservancy. Jody responds that holding on to a property with no identifiable end-user, it would likely become a demolition project.

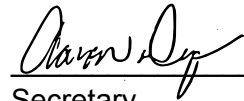
Mr. Chmiel notes that the land bank has many properties with no identified end-users. Jody replies that while that is true, none of the other properties have deed restrictions like this one.

Mr. O'Grady notes that maintaining a barn is different from regular building maintenance. Mr. Chmiel notes that the Athens County Visitors Bureau has grant programs that organizations like Mr. O'Grady's could apply for as the land bank isn't eligible.

Mr. Eliason moves that the land bank negotiate a transfer agreement with The Nature Conservancy, 2nd by Mr. Chmiel. Mr. Sappington thanked all who attended the meeting and noted that he couldn't see himself supporting something like permanent ownership without a plan beyond the end of 2027. All Yeas.

2. Adjournment: Motion to adjourn by Mr. Eliason, 2nd by Mr. Chmiel. All Yeas. Adjournment at 11:42 AM.

Minutes submitted for approval by Aaron Dye, Secretary



Secretary

8/19/2026

Date

Approved, as amended (if any) on 8/19/2026

Proposed Long-Term Protection Mechanisms for Gifford Barn

- **Conservation easement** held by County prohibiting uses of the parcel/barn that would be incompatible with conservation values of the adjacent mitigation project.
For example:
 - o Restrictions on livestock, waste disposal, hazardous materials storage
 - o Restrictions against future development of parcel
- **Deed restriction** held by County providing for automatic ownership transfer to ODNR if the barn is demolished or reaches a state of material disrepair
- **Deed restriction** limiting future fee ownership to nonprofit or public entities
- **Deed covenant** requiring grantee to conduct fence maintenance and other boundary management practices to control trespass onto adjoining conservation lands
- **Enforcement rights** of County to ensure compliance with conservation easement and deed restrictions
 - o County will hold funds provided by TNC for barn removal in case of ownership transfer