

# HEALTHY BUILDINGS ADVISORY GROUP: MEETING 1

## Meeting Summary + Emerging Themes July 31, 2025

### **INTRODUCTION**

On July 31, 2025, the City of Columbus convened stakeholders for the first of five feedback sessions to help inform the Building Performance Standard (BPS) policy in development. Over the course of five advisory group meetings, this group of stakeholders will provide insight into how a BPS would affect the sectors and industries they represent, as well as provide suggestions as the City crafts a BPS that best serves Columbus' building owners, meets the moment of growing energy demand in Central Ohio, and preserves affordability and prosperity for residents and businesses.

Building and Zoning Services Deputy Director, Tony Celebrezze, opened the meeting by level setting with the group. Columbus has a growing population, which in turn is putting more pressure on our energy resources and demand on our grid. More housing, and especially affordable housing, is required in the City to meet these needs. Programs such as LinkUS and ZoneIN have been put into effect, but there is still work that needs to be done to reduce energy usage and costs for Columbus residents and building owners. To pass good legislation, the City needs to understand the impacts to the public and industry, which is why we've gathered the Healthy Buildings Advisory Group together. Deputy Director Celebrezze encouraged advisory group members to engage in dialogue with one another and get creative over the course of the Advisory Group meetings.

Sustainable Columbus's Assistant Director, Erin Beck, outlined the importance of energy efficiency as energy demand in Central Ohio rises. While a BPS supports building owners as they make energy efficiency upgrades in their buildings, the policy would also prove supportive for Columbus's climate goals of reaching carbon neutrality by 2050. In 2023, energy use in buildings accounted for 52% of emissions in Columbus. Making changes that result in our biggest buildings using less energy would improve air quality and benefit residents' and tenants' health.

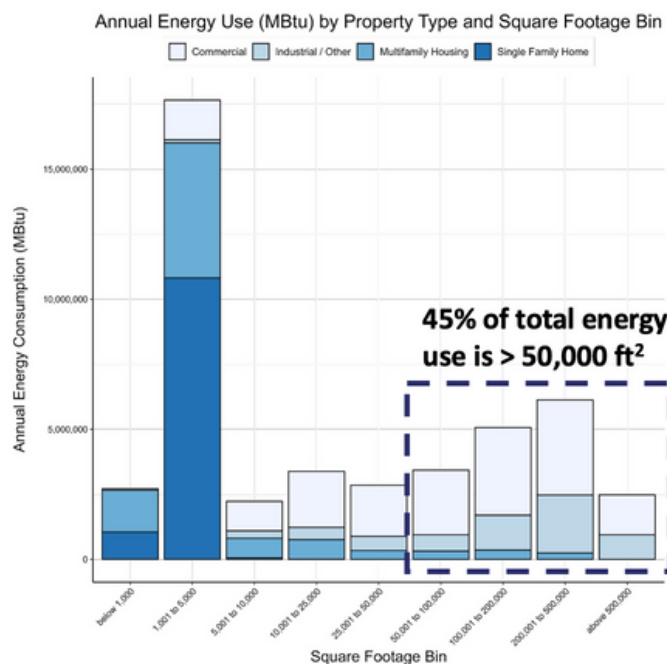
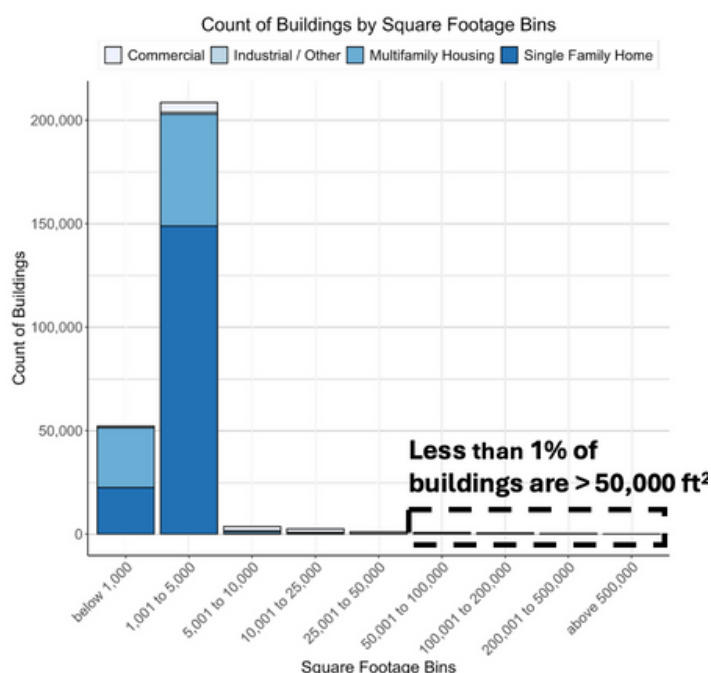
### **COLUMBUS BENCHMARKING ORDINANCE PAVES THE WAY FOR BUILDING PERFORMANCE STANDARDS**

Eric Porr then gave an overview of Columbus's current Benchmarking Ordinance. The ordinance applies to existing buildings over 50,000 square feet, and requires them to annually submit their energy and water usage to the City. Building owners who have been in compliance with the ordinance for at least three years have seen an average 3% reduction in energy usage. Data reporting for benchmarking has also identified anomalies such as water leaks and alerted building owners so that they're able to address them. The groundwork to set up processes and infrastructure to handle benchmarking will serve as a foundation for building owners to comply with a BPS.

Then, the University of Cincinnati's Dr. Amanda Webb, who has done extensive data collection and analysis to inform decision-making and policy design for Ohio cities pursuing the passage of a BPS as part of the DOE's Resilient and Efficient Codes Implementation Grant, introduced BPS as a way for Columbus to join together to improve the building stock. She explained that a BPS only applies to existing buildings, not new construction, and the policy is made up of four main components:

- *Scope: What buildings are included in the scope? For example, scope could address building usage typology and square footage threshold.*
- *Metric: What metric is used to measure performance? For example, other jurisdictions have used energy usage intensity (EUI), greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) intensity, or Energy Star score.*
- *Targets: What are the performance targets? What approach and stringency level should inform target-setting?*
- *Timeframe: What is the compliance timeframe and enforcement mechanism?*

She then introduced an analysis of Columbus's current building stock, with key data points showing that less than 1% of buildings in the city are over 50,000 square feet, yet 45% of total building energy usage is used by buildings over 50,000 square feet. Focusing a BPS on larger buildings allows cities to get the most "bang for their buck" in terms of utility bill savings, emissions reduction, and pollution reduction.



## STAKEHOLDER DISCUSSION THEMES

There were discussion and question and answer sessions throughout the meeting, facilitated through the use of Mentimeter, a web-based interactive tool which allows advisory group members to answer questions anonymously, and open discussion. Some of the recurring themes were:

- **Compliance, Accuracy & Enforcement:**

- How will water and energy usage data be collected and validated?
- How will exemptions be handled for buildings that may be facing other factors – such as historic buildings, or buildings that serve low-income tenants?

- **Resource & Implementation Gaps:**

- Affordable housing developers may lack the resources to comply.
- Financing gaps, especially in affordable housing (e.g., LIHTC complexities), were flagged as barriers.
- Stakeholders showed interest in learning more about the ways building owners will be supported, and requested clarity on technical support and financial incentives of a BPS once implemented.
- Need to ensure local trades and labor have capacity for increased building improvement work.

- **Equity and Feasibility Concerns**

- Need to ensure the policy is cost-optimal, equitable, and feasible for owners and developers.
- Developers raised issues around rising energy and financing costs, regulatory layering, and difficulty making projects “pencil out.”
- Concerns over federal incentive change, market change, and how generally quickly-changing conditions will be accounted for in a BPS policy.
- Need to ensure that consumer protections are in place for safeguarding individual tenant data.

- **Learning from Other Jurisdictions:**

- Discussion of how other cities/states are implementing BPSs.
- Highlighted the importance of learning from others while tailoring to Columbus’s unique needs.

## **LOOKING AHEAD**

These themes will allow the City to come prepared in the upcoming meetings to address the questions that the advisory group has. The schedule for upcoming meetings is as follows:

- Policy Components Workshop: August 28th
- Scenario Impacts, Data Deep Dive: September 25th
- Incentives and Technical Support: October 30th
- Wrap Up and Next Steps: November 20th



## ***ATTENDING ORGANIZATIONS***

Columbia Gas  
AEP Ohio  
Columbus Water and Power  
Affordable Housing Alliance of Central Ohio  
IMPACT Community Advocates  
IMPACT Community Action  
Central Ohio Building and Construction Trades Council  
Smart Columbus  
Columbus Chamber of Commerce  
ASPYR  
Ohio State University Sustainability Institute  
Ohio Hospital Association  
American Institute of Architects Columbus Chapter  
NAIOP  
Columbus Region Green Fund  
Columbus City Council



**SUSTAINABLE  
COLUMBUS**

ANDREW J. GINTHER, MAYOR