

# Q&A with Deputy Secretary Orlando Almonte

*October 24, 2025*

Deputy Secretary Orlando Almonte from the Governor's Office joined the Coalition for Sustainable Housing to preview Pennsylvania's forthcoming Statewide Housing Action Plan and discuss how lessons from the state's listening sessions are shaping priorities for 2025 and beyond.

**Q: What did you and the Governor's team learn from the statewide housing forums?**

**Deputy Secretary Almonte:** While there's broad agreement that Pennsylvania must address housing, the right tools vary by place. Local governments, nonprofits, and developers often see the challenges differently. That realization pushed us toward a "toolkit" approach—creating flexible programs that can be adapted locally rather than one-size-fits-all solutions.

**Q: Where does Lancaster County fit within that picture?**

**Almonte:** Lancaster is in the middle—part metro, part rural. The county's interest in zoning reform, infill development, and regulatory flexibility aligns closely with what we're hearing across the state. Given land constraints, future growth will rely more on infill and vertical development than new sprawl.

**Q: Once the Housing Action Plan is released, what role can coalitions like C4SH play?**

**Almonte:** We'll need partners who both help shape the details and advocate for implementation. The plan will outline broad directions, but much of it will require legislative action and local buy-in. Advocacy from coalitions like yours can help refine programs so they're practical and inclusive.

**Q: Equity is a core principle of the plan. How will the administration define or measure it?**

**Almonte:** We're using equity as a guiding lens even if federal rules limit how directly we can reference it. We'll look at racial disparities in homeownership, geographic distribution of state investments, and income targeting. The plan also recognizes that communities may need flexibility beyond the 80% AMI threshold to address workforce and "missing middle" housing gaps.

**Q: How has the state budget impasse affected progress on housing?**

**Almonte:** The delay is partly political and partly about real policy differences, but it won't change our priorities. It may affect timing or scale. While new funding is essential, we're also identifying "low or no-cost" solutions—like building code and zoning reforms—that can move forward without major appropriations.

**Q: Zoning reform is a major topic for Lancaster. What role can the state play?**

**Almonte:** True zoning authority rests with local governments, so any statewide change would require legislation. We're focusing first on incentives rather than mandates—creating a "housing-ready" community designation that prioritizes flexible, pro-housing municipalities for

future funding. The state can also streamline its own processes, such as highway occupancy permits and DEP approvals, to reduce development delays.

**Q: How is the administration approaching prevailing wage requirements?**

**Almonte:** The Governor supports strong wages, so broad prevailing wage reform is not part of the housing plan. We recognize it can complicate certain programs, like Whole Home Repairs, but we're exploring targeted flexibility within specific initiatives rather than systemwide changes.

**Q: What will qualify a municipality as "housing ready"?**

**Almonte:** We're developing a points-based system, drawing from examples in other states. Communities could earn credit for steps like allowing ADUs, streamlining permitting, or adopting a housing plan. Some restrictive policies may disqualify eligibility.

**Q: Manufactured housing came up in the listening sessions. How will it be addressed?**

**Almonte:** It's a major concern, especially with private investors buying communities and raising lot rents. We plan to extend preservation resources to manufactured home parks and explore how to reclassify these homes to improve financing options.

**Q: What about small developers—how will the plan support them?**

**Almonte:** We want to make it easier for smaller, emerging developers to enter the market through forgivable loans, small grants, and mentoring programs modeled after initiatives like Jumpstart Germantown.

**Q: Looking ahead to the 2025 election, how durable is this plan across administrations?**

**Almonte:** Housing has become a bipartisan issue. Rising costs and limited supply affect every part of the state. The specific programs might evolve, but the need for action is clear and widely shared.

**Q: What surprised you most about the homelessness discussions?**

**Almonte:** The lack of coordination and consistent data. Even in large regions, many groups had never worked together or measured shared outcomes. Improving data and accountability will be central to how we allocate future funding.

**Q: Was there discussion about wages and affordability more broadly?**

**Almonte:** Yes, though it won't be a direct part of the housing plan. Stagnant wages are a core reason affordability remains out of reach, but addressing minimum wage or workforce development requires a separate statewide strategy.

**Q: What about the connection between employers and housing?**

**Almonte:** We're exploring more employer-assisted housing models and partnerships, building on small pilots through PHFA and DCED. As new industries expand into areas without nearby housing, we'll look for ways to encourage or require housing considerations in major economic development deals.