

Qualified Allocation Plan Interactive Maps

Ohio Housing Finance Agency

Management Innovation: Internal Operations

HFA Staff Contact

Dorcas Taylor Jones

djones@ohiohome.org

Ohio Housing Finance Agency

Category: Management Innovation
Subcategory: Internal Operations
Entry: Qualified Allocation Plan Interactive Maps



BACKGROUND / SUMMARY

The Ohio Housing Finance Agency aims to ensure every Ohioan has a safe and affordable place to call home. A critical aspect of this mission is encouraging the development of high-quality affordable housing each year through the Housing Tax Credit program. The competitive criteria and requirements outlined in the Qualified Allocation Plan (QAP) help ensure that the applications OHFA funds meet the needs of low-income Ohioans and contribute to thriving communities around the state. Writing a QAP that meets these goals is complex and involves feedback from multiple stakeholders, analysis of housing-related data, and balancing the current and future needs of different populations and regions.

A key challenge OHFA faces is how to make the QAP a transparent, usable document, with a clear scoring process. In previous years, OHFA outlined qualifications and criteria in a series of PDFs and printed tables. Applicants were then required to juggle multiple documents and maps to determine if their proposed property fit within different geographical and statistical criteria. Furthermore, applicants were required to submit numerous screen shots as evidence that their site met these criteria, which was cumbersome and frustrating for developers and OHFA analysts. This process inherently involved a lack of data standardization and clarity for definitions, data sources, and evidence submitted by developers. To make the process more usable, transparent, and objective, OHFA created a better functioning and more empirical application and scoring method to improve the application, scoring, and decision-making process.

INTERVENTION / EXECUTION

Beginning with the 2020-'21 QAP, the Office of Housing Policy collaborated with the Office of Multifamily Housing to create a more data-driven and streamlined approach to the competitive criteria of the QAP. The creation of the interactive QAP maps provided a number of critical innovations in both the planning and scoring of HTC applications.

First, the interactive maps played a critical role during the QAP planning process. OHFA employed Arc GIS Online to map and visualize the key housing metrics that we have historically used to measure regional housing need and demand, such as percent of extremely low-income households, projected growth of adults aged 55 or older, etc. Using the maps we were able to overlay layers to examine the spatial distribution of need and opportunity across the state to ensure the scoring process balanced different regions and achieved OHFA's policy priorities.

We balanced these need metrics with a series of metrics intended to encourage development in high-opportunity regions. We mapped county and census tract-level indicators, such as school district grades, dense employment centers, and transit access. We then used a mixture of publicly available data and point-level business data to create latitude-longitude level amenity data that corresponds to the amenities in the QAP, such as grocery stores and libraries.

We created a series of distance bands around these amenities based on spatial location (i.e., 1 mile in urban areas and 5 miles in rural areas) to identify regions with significant amenity

density. Using the distribution of these resources as a guide, OHFA was able to incentivize development near amenities, such as proximity not just to schools, but to high-quality schools.

Ohio Housing Finance Agency

Category: Management Innovation
Subcategory: Internal Operations
Entry: Qualified Allocation Plan Interactive Maps



Second, the QAP maps provided much needed standardization and transparency to applicants. OHFA published the interactive maps to the website at the same time the QAP was released. We included maps and tailored instructions for each sub-pool (FIGURES 1 & 2), to guide developers as they used the maps in their application. When each map opens, the entire state is shown with eligibility areas for the sub-pool automatically shaded in gray (FIGURE 3). The metrics specific to that pool—and the points corresponding to each metric—are displayed on the right-hand side of the screen. The user can turn each layer “on” or “off” to see how points are distributed across Ohio and within their pool (FIGURE 4). For additional details, the “pop up” function of Arc GIS Online allows the user to see specific data by clicking on a location. All the underlying data that is not proprietary to another organization is provided as downloadable excel files (FIGURE 5).

Users can enter and mark a specific address into the search bar at the top-left of the page. The map will zoom and mark the address entered, e.g., FIGURE 6 shows a marker at the OHFA building. The user can then easily determine how a specific address would qualify and score on specific metrics for each pool. For example, if the OHFA building was a potential site for HTC, when using the *Affordable Housing Demand* metric, the map shows that this address has 81 affordable and available units in the area per 100 very low-income renters, meaning it would receive 3 points (out of 5 available) on the QAP.

The interactive maps standardize and clarify data and evidence that can be used as part of an application package. This feature is particularly important for amenities, which are historically more subjective. In the directions, OHFA clearly defines what types and kinds of amenities can qualify for points. The interactive maps also include layers for each amenity category, with the location of the amenity mapped and the appropriate buffer size for the specific QAP pool. FIGURE 7 demonstrates how the example building would score in terms of proximity to public libraries. Each orange dot represents a public library, and the encompassing orange ring shows the 1-mile radius around that library (this is for an urban pool.) Any properties that fall within that ring receive 1 point (out of one available) on the QAP. By providing amenities and the appropriate spatial buffer, the interactive maps are an important improvement in the quality and clarity of application, development, and scoring. This replaces a system in which applicants needed to submit a screen shot of an online map, which showed any amenity and its distance to the proposed property.

IMPACT

This is the first time a Housing Finance Agency has complemented the QAP with public, interactive maps that external developers and internal analysts use to score applications. OHFA is excited to see the benefits of this new interface and believe it will drive the agency’s mission, improve relationships with housing developers in the state, and heighten the quality and quantity of HTC applications that we receive on a yearly basis. In particular, the maps help meet the goals of more effectively identifying areas of need and opportunity, promoting data objectivity and transparency, and streamlining the competitive scoring process.

First, being able to use maps to visualize key metrics across the state allows for a better understanding of which areas are most in need of housing. Combining this data with observations and insights from community groups and relevant stakeholders helps to paint a broader picture of the current needs of Ohioans. These maps also allow us to balance the allocation of points ensuring that areas are not under- or over-served in the QAP. This is critical, as one of OHFA’s key goals is to serve the state equitably.

Ohio Housing Finance Agency

Category: Management Innovation
Subcategory: Internal Operations
Entry: Qualified Allocation Plan Interactive Maps



Second, the data and methodology is readily available to developers and the public. Guidelines and instructions help all stakeholders understand the metrics and definitions for competitive scoring categories, which minimizes ambiguity and helps provide an equal playing field for all developers. Because the maps establish a clear set of data, analysts are able to respond to requests regarding amenities. For example, in cases where a developer believes an amenity that does not appear on the map should be included, analysts are able to review the existing data and determine if the proposed amenity aligns with the existing definition and data. Not only does this streamline the application process, but it also potentially lowers barriers for application. As developers are able to see how potential properties may score, this may encourage a broader pool of developers to apply, increasing competition and decreasing barriers to affordable housing development.

Finally, the maps present an easy-to-use platform for developers and analysts to score projects. This cuts down on discrepancies as all applicants and analysts are using the same maps and data. Additionally, the maps can easily be replicated and updated year-over-year as the housing landscape in Ohio changes and needs shift. This minimizes error in scoring and reduces overall time to score, increasing efficiency for the Agency. As an unseen benefit, Agency analysts have indicated that the maps bring fun into the evaluation and scoring process for the amenity category.

The Agency's improved relationship with its development partners and more efficient scoring process for staff has made the competitive QAP process less complex. Ultimately, a gain in efficiencies and relationship development is a win for low-income Ohioans and communities across the state.

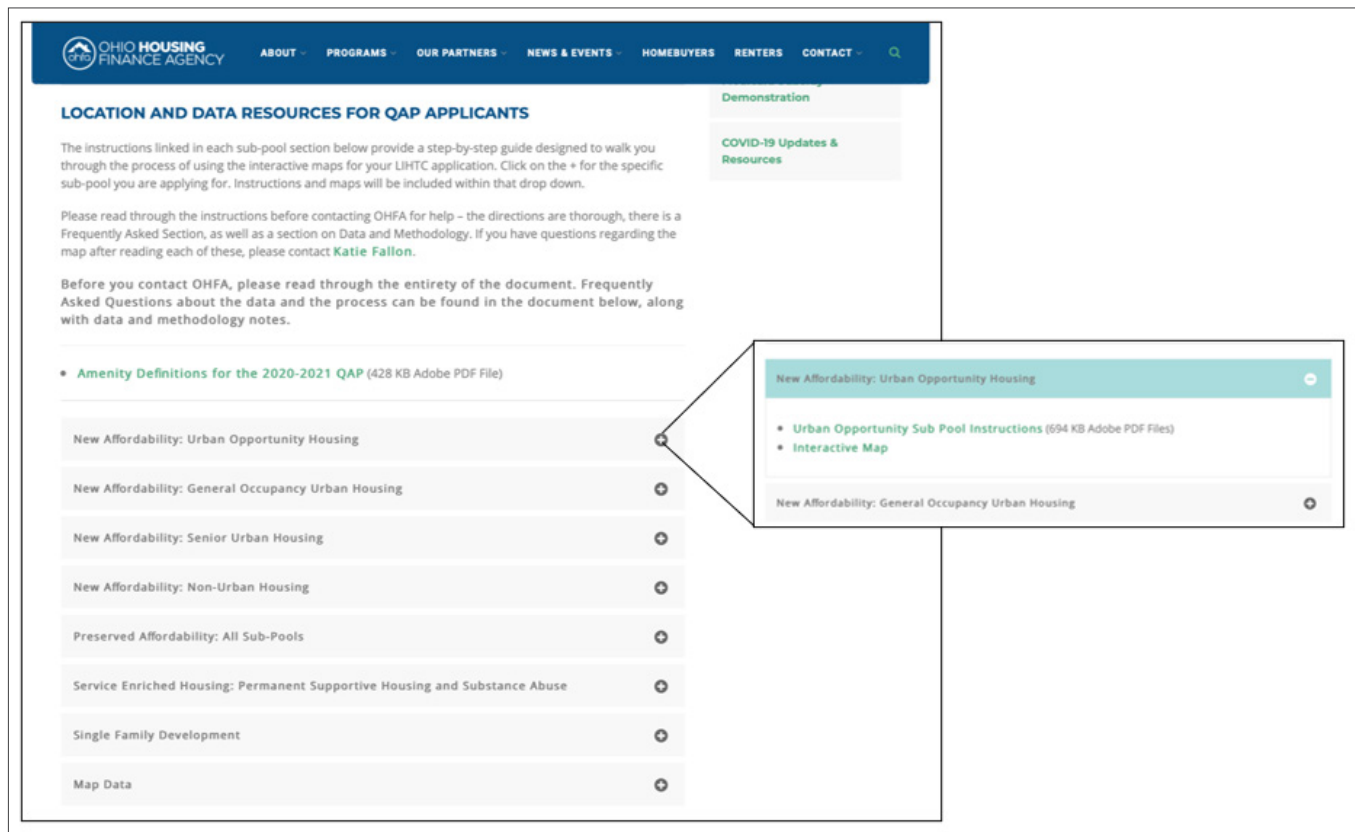
Ohio Housing Finance Agency

Category: Management Innovation
Subcategory: Internal Operations
Entry: Qualified Allocation Plan Interactive Maps



VISUAL AIDS

Figure 1: [Interactive Location and Data Resources for QAP Applicants](#)




Ohio Housing Finance Agency

Category: Management Innovation
Subcategory: Internal Operations
Entry: Qualified Allocation Plan Interactive Maps



Figure 2: [Example of Sub Pool Instructions – Urban Opportunity Housing](#)

**OHIO HOUSING
FINANCE AGENCY**

Mike DeWine Governor of Ohio | Sean W. Thomas Executive Director

57 East Main Street | Columbus OH 43215

Before you contact OHFA, please read through the entirety of the document. Frequently Asked Questions about the data and the process are included at the bottom of this document, as are data and methodology notes. If you have questions regarding the map after reading each of these, please contact Katie Fallon (kfallon@ohiohome.org).

INSTRUCTIONS FOR URBAN OPPORTUNITY HOUSING SUB-POOL

These instructions include details for using the Urban Opportunity Housing Sub-Pool interactive map. This map includes data layers that correspond to the following competitive criteria:

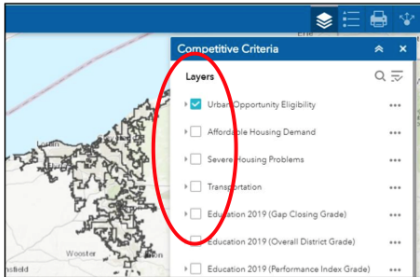
- Affordable Housing Demand
- Severe Housing Problems
- Transportation
- Education
 - o Gap closing grade
 - o Performance grade
 - o Overall grade
- Low Poverty Area Below 10%
- Low Poverty Area Below 15%
- Entry Level Job Access
- Set Aside: Non-R/ECAP
- Eligibility: Opportunity Areas
- Eligibility: Moderate Opportunity Areas with Community Change Index
- Proximity to amenities*
 - o Full service supermarket
 - o Restaurant or café
 - o Pharmacy or medical clinics
 - o Public park
 - o Public library
 - o Church or religious building
 - o Public school

*Public recreation center and cultural facility datasets are not included

Step 1: Navigate to the map page using [this hyperlink](#).

Step 2: A list of the relevant geographic layers needed for your application will appear when you enter. The layer outlining the eligible areas for the Urban Opportunity Housing sub-pool will be turned on.

If you would like to see how each of these layers are distributed throughout the state, you can click on the small box on the left-hand side of the name to turn that layer on. For best results, turn each layer on one at a time.

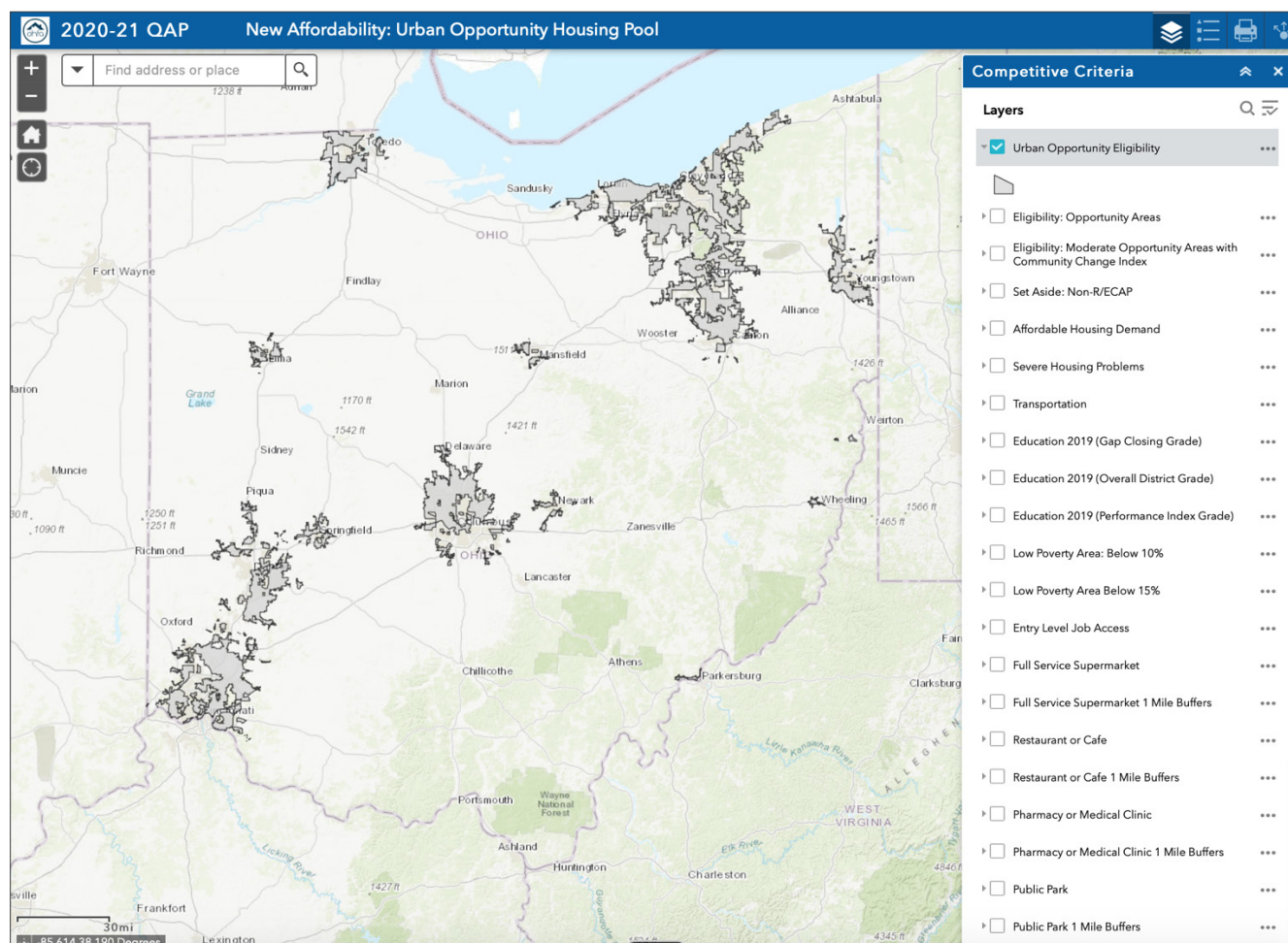


Ohio Housing Finance Agency

Category: Management Innovation
Subcategory: Internal Operations
Entry: Qualified Allocation Plan Interactive Maps



Figure 3: [Example of Interactive Map – Urban Opportunity Housing](#)

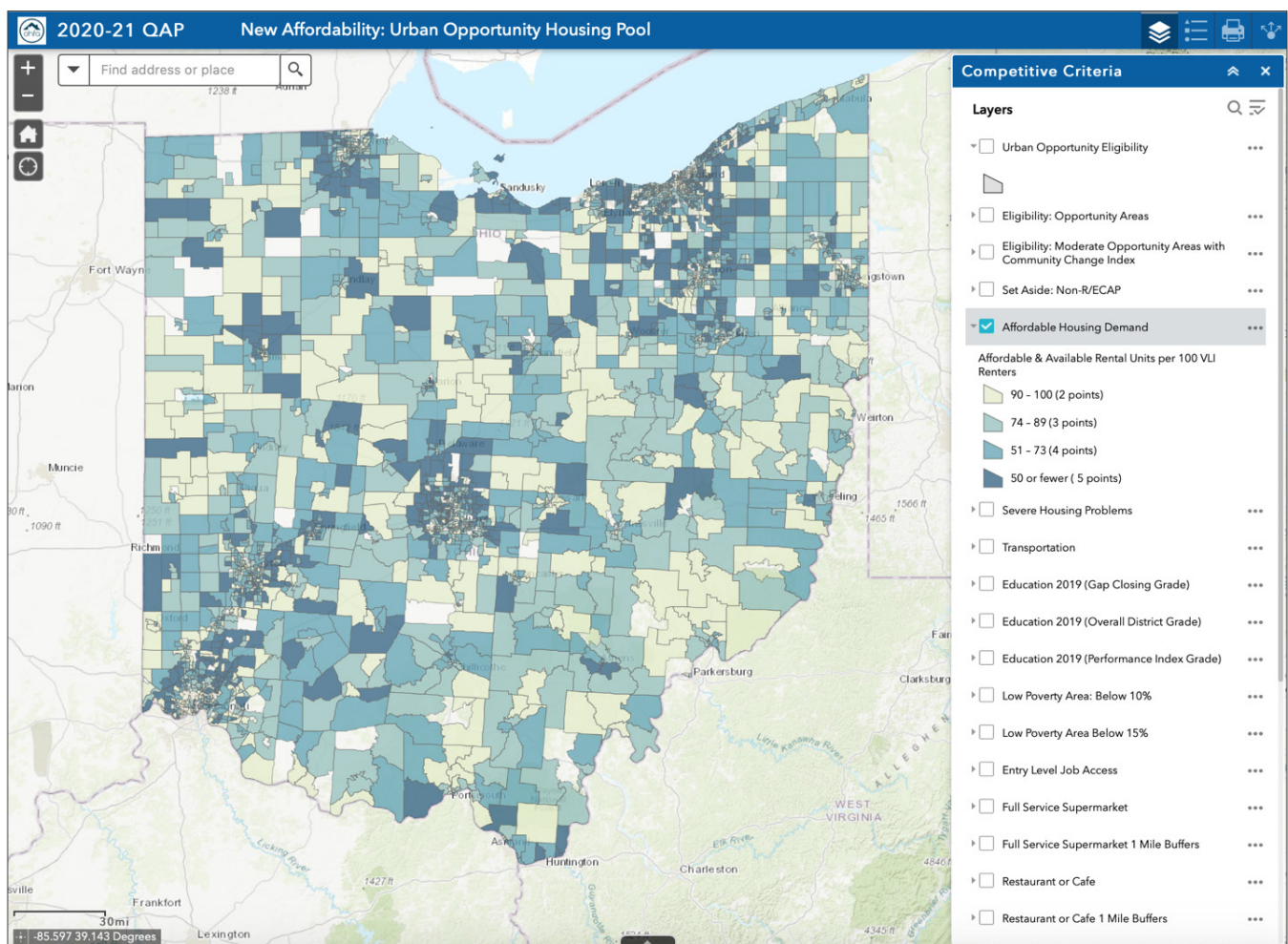


Ohio Housing Finance Agency

Category: Management Innovation
Subcategory: Internal Operations
Entry: Qualified Allocation Plan Interactive Maps



Figure 4: Example of Affordable Housing Demand Metric

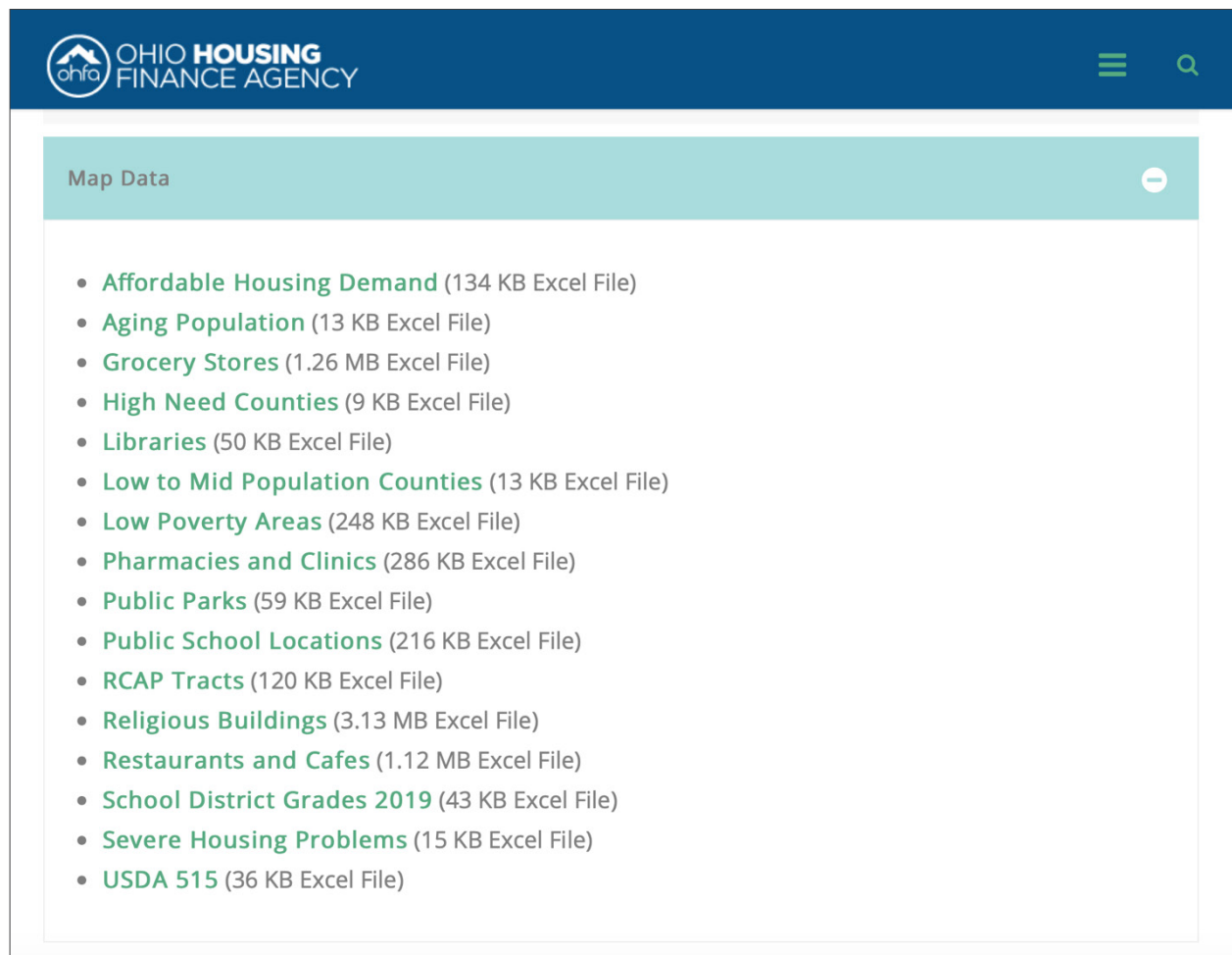


Ohio Housing Finance Agency

Category: Management Innovation
Subcategory: Internal Operations
Entry: Qualified Allocation Plan Interactive Maps



Figure 5: [Downloadable Map Data](#)

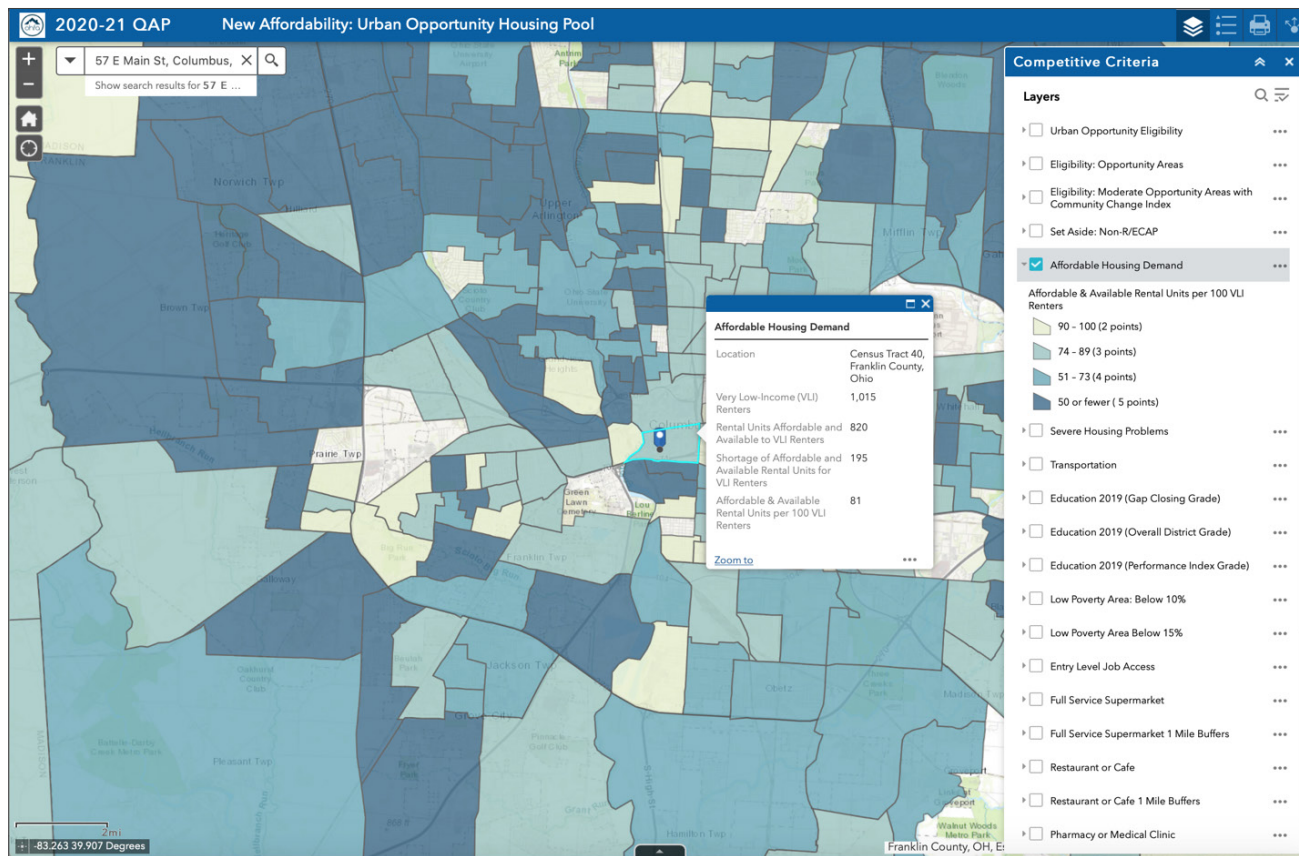


Ohio Housing Finance Agency

Category: Management Innovation
Subcategory: Internal Operations
Entry: Qualified Allocation Plan Interactive Maps



Figure 6: Example of Affordable Housing Demand Metric Near OHFA



Ohio Housing Finance Agency

Category: Management Innovation
Subcategory: Internal Operations
Entry: Qualified Allocation Plan Interactive Maps



Figure 7: Example of Public Library Amenity and 1-Mile Buffers Near OHFA

