



Citizens' Housing and Planning Association (CHAPA) September 2022 Regional Forum

In September 2022, CHAPA reimagined our Annual Regional Meeting series as a virtual Regional Forum. This forum brought together municipal staff, elected officials, nonprofit organizations, resident advocates, and others, to discuss their housing work over the last year.

After a presentation by CHAPA's Policy and Municipal Engagement Teams, attendees participated in Breakout Rooms organized by region. These regions included: Greater Boston, Worcester/Central Massachusetts, North Shore, South Shore, MetroWest, Cape and Islands, Franklin/Hampden/Hampshire Counties, and Berkshire County. In each Breakout Room, CHAPA staff members facilitated discussions on topics ranging from successful new local policies, to funding gaps, zoning changes, Fair Housing, and community engagement.

CHAPA hosts these Regional Meetings each year so that we can hear directly from housing practitioners and advocates on the ground. These conversations have a profound impact on our Legislative Priorities and our advocacy efforts at the state and local level. The following is a brief and high-level overview of what we heard from attendees. It is by no means exhaustive, and only represents the opinions of those who were able to attend. CHAPA will continue to work alongside housing advocates at all levels to ensure that our work is firmly rooted in their expertise and lived experience.

Cross-Regional Themes + Key Takeaways

- Participants in nearly every region expressed concerns about increasing rents, and the significant need for rental assistance.
- Concerns about municipal staff lacking capacity were expressed across a wide array of communities at different scales.
- Many attendees felt that development for households at 80% Area Median Income is insufficient to meet the need in many communities, particularly those who fall under an AMI that is vastly different from their local Median Household Income.
- High construction costs are a severe impediment to building more housing, as are prolonged zoning and permitting processes. The impact is most severe in communities that cannot recoup those costs through higher rent and sales prices, which deters development overall.
- Fair Housing is a focus in many communities, some of whom are introducing new resources to address housing discrimination
- Participants felt strongly that the Notice to Quit requirement for RAFT should be removed.
- Many communities support the Real Estate Transfer Fee, and believe it would have a meaningful impact on housing affordability.
- Participants expressed a need for financial assistance that goes towards other housing costs beyond rent and down payment assistance. These include utilities, HOA fees, application fees, taxes, etc.
- There is an ongoing need for community education and coalition building to combat NIMBYism and anti-development sentiment.

In addition to the broader conversation, key themes emerged in the Regional Break-out Groups.

Greater Boston

- Lack of capacity amongst City staff, which slows things down
- Zoning and permitting process is significantly delaying development
- Support for Real Estate Transfer Fee
- Need to focus on Fair Housing
- End RAFT Notice to Quit requirement
- Continuing to see high rates of need for rental assistance

Worcester/Central MA

- High materials and construction costs
- Some communities have a cap on # of dwelling units
- Struggling to get deeper affordability in new developments
- Lack of staff capacity
- Rent increases
- Worcester hopes to pass Inclusionary Zoning Ordinance
- Need for more technical assistance
- HDIP has been successful at creating more market rate units, still need more incentives for affordable housing
- Vacant Property Ordinance has been helpful

North Shore

- Extremely high prices for both rental + homeownership
- Rental units being converted to short term/AirBNBs
- Developments being rejected due to water usage concerns
- Need for housing in 30% AMI range
- Resistance to ADUs
- Need for supportive wrap-around services

South Shore

- High construction costs
- Need to support Local Housing Authorities with more funding and staff
- Need funds for things other than mortgage payments - such as property taxes for older adults, HOA fees, and applications fees
- Substantial rent increases (as much as \$500-\$1000 per month)
- Lack of public transportation
- Education on available housing resources, homebuying, various types of affordable housing opportunities has been successful
- Increased support for the housing search process is needed

MetroWest

- Need for deeper affordability, 80% AMI is not sufficient to meet need
- Alternative ways of “screening” potential renters/buyers, other than credit score
- Funding for Fair Housing testing
- Need for education on what “affordable” really means
- Need advocacy that focuses on the relationship between housing, social justice, sustainability, and accessibility

Cape & Islands

- Need seasonal workforce housing
- Need for more resources for First Time Homebuyers
- Labor shortage (construction workers, engineers, architects, etc)
- Need for more data on local housing market
- Need for emergency shelter
- Loss of rental housing
- Enforcement of Fair Housing

Franklin/Hampden/Hampshire Counties

- Lack of rental housing leading to skyrocketing rents
- Concerns about short term rentals
- Support for Real Estate Transfer Fee
- Costs of development can't be recouped by rent/sales price
- Desire to create a Regional Housing Trust
- Regional Fair Market Rate calculations don't really represent the communities
- Trying to start a Franklin County Community Land Trust

Berkshire County

- Need for development at a wide range of income levels
- Housing efforts need to be part of broader economic development efforts, worker retention has been an issue because of missing middle housing
- Need for community education to combat NIMBY attitudes
- Home Rule Petition is an impediment to positive change
- Desire to see municipalities be more involved as developers of housing
- Need for programs that support housing stability, including MRVP as an entitlement, longer-term financial assistance programs, TPP, Housing Counseling, etc.