



CHAPA Municipal Engagement Initiative

Founded in 2018, **our Municipal Engagement Initiative (MEI) works with residents on the ground to change the conversation and support existing local efforts in favor of more affordable housing.** Each city or town has its unique housing challenges, so we focus on bringing together local businesses, civic groups, houses of worship, and other groups and individuals that are active in their community to build coalitions of support for affordable housing production.

What is MEI Lite?

The Municipal Engagement Initiative is typically an intensive year-long collaboration between the municipality, CHAPA, and the emerging stakeholder group. However, many communities need help getting their efforts launched without ongoing, long-term assistance. Through the MEI Lite, CHAPA will help a community to create a stakeholder list, begin outreach, hold and facilitate a coalition launch meeting, and provide some ideas of next steps as the coalition grows and evolves.

MEI Lite Pre-Launch

- 1) Create a steering group to help plan the launch meeting and commit to ongoing organizational work. This can be a joint effort of the municipality, civic groups, interested individuals, or any combination that works for you.
- 2) Before launching, you will want to create your stakeholder group. [This stakeholder group list](#) will help you to consider who might take part in building a housing coalition to change the conversation and support existing and future local efforts in favor of more housing and affordable housing production. **You know your community better than anyone else.** If there are groups or individuals that are critical thought leaders, civic leaders or people who get things done in your community, you should invite them to be at the table.

- 3) Pick a date and location for the launch. Typically, launch meetings are held in the evenings, but you know your group and how you will get the best attendance. Pick a location that is easily accessible, allows a large group to sit in a round if possible, and does not carry any negative associations for potential invited stakeholders. Some groups use a municipal building. Others use a community center or church.
- 4) A representative from the steering group should send out an invitation email to the stakeholder list. Proposed language could look like this:

**Help Build Support for Housing in “Community Name”
Join us on “Date and Time at Location” to get involved!**

Do you want to see more housing options and more affordable housing in “Community”? Do you have ideas of how we can make that happen? Do you want to join an effort to build support for housing opportunities in “Community” and meet the housing needs of the community? Join us to learn more about what can be done and to get involved in a new Housing in “Community” Coalition working to make an impact.

The Housing in “Community” Coalition is a group of concerned residents and community leaders working to identify and advocate for affordable housing solutions in “Community”. The work is supported by the “Municipality Name and Department”, list of civic groups on steering committee, and the Municipal Engagement Initiative of the Citizens' Housing and Planning Association (CHAPA).

If you are interested in joining the Housing in “Community” Coalition to be a part of creating and advocating for solutions to our housing needs here in “Community”, please reach out to me at “Contact Info”.

If you would like to get involved, but are unable to attend the first meeting on “Date”, please let me know and I will be sure to keep you up to date about efforts going forward.

- 5) Do some direct outreach to key stakeholders, either via email or phone call. Help them to understand the purpose of the creation of this group, the launch meeting, and why their input and participation is critical. If they are not available, ask them to suggest an alternative representative from their group or organization.

Launch Meeting Planning

Below is a standard framing of what the Launch Meeting should cover in some form. Again, you know your community better than anyone else, so feel free to suggest additions or edits.

- 1) A welcome and framing of why we are all here: To come to a shared understanding of the housing problems in Community and organize to create more affordable opportunities in Community. To create a broad constituency for affordable housing in Community. Not to replicate the work of each individual group represented in the room, but rather to coordinate efforts and support each other towards mutual goal.
- 2) Introductions of everyone's different roles/groups they represent: we need to make sure everyone understands why they and their various groups are a critical voice in this work. We do not want to spend too much time on this, but it is important that people start to get to know each other and their perspectives. We have a couple of activities that we utilize to help us do this without taking too much time.
- 3) Sharing of some basic housing data so we all start with that as a jumping off point and begin on the same page. Usually we follow this presentation with a brief discussion of what resonates, what was surprising and what was missing from the data presented. The group will likely identify additional data they would like to see in the future.
- 4) Identifying key barriers that folks view as keeping more affordable housing from being built in Community: this will be a big brainstorming session and we may need to do breakouts to help facilitate if the group is large, or do a partnering activity to ensure everyone participates.
- 5) Identifying the key concerns that the group will have to address in order to move an agenda forward (whether perceived/myths or real): We will be careful not to frame this **just** as myths. Some concerns will be valid and the group will need to have good responses to mitigate concerns. Other concerns will be more about misunderstandings in the community and help to identify areas needing better education about need/strategies.
- 6) Starting the conversation about what the next steps of this larger group should be and how you all will continue to coordinate and move forward. This should also include a list of "Who is missing from the room/discussion?" We

have several models that we have used and can provide examples and benefits/challenges of each to help move the group forward. This does not need to be decided in this meeting, but it is good to start the conversation.

At the end of this packet, you'll find a [sample meeting agenda](#) from the Brookline MEI Lite, which can serve as model for creation of your local Launch Meeting agenda.

During the Launch Meeting

CHAPA will facilitate the meeting but may call on the steering committee members to play certain roles or fill in gaps. CHAPA staff will take notes and conduct a follow-up call with the steering committee to make suggestions of next steps and strategies for continued efforts.

MEI Lite Community Next Steps to Consider

After the Launch Meeting, it is critical to build upon the momentum and help stakeholders to see how they can continue to contribute to the work.

- 1) **Send a follow up email:** Send an email thanking attendees and include those who were interested in the group but may not have been able to participate in the launch meeting. Summarize the key take-aways of the meeting (i.e. enthusiasm for the work, interest in a regular coalition meeting, folks who were suggested to include in the future, etc.) Let participants know that you plan to find a way to identify a date for a follow up meeting or preferably a consistent meet time that works for folks i.e. every third Wednesday of the month. Doodle is a useful tool to accomplish this. If resources were requested or referenced in the meeting, provide links or attachments.
- 2) **Follow up Meeting:** At your follow-up meeting, you can try to incorporate some of the ideas listed here. CHAPA staff is happy to provide more info on this work if interested.
 1. **Lifecycle of Housing:** This exercise is an excellent opportunity to build off the momentum of the initial meeting and helps attendees not only express their own individual life experiences but also understand the experiences of others in the community and how that might play a role in identifying shared housing goals and plans. Contact CHAPA staff to obtain a copy of the activity and instructions.

2. Who is missing in the room?: Continue to build on the Potential Stakeholder List document to think outside the box of whom you might consider adding to the voices in the room. Ask participants to contribute to this list, paying close attention to who is influential, critical to work moving forward, or who may have lived experience not represented so far.
3. Shared Goals and Plan: Participate in an exercise to identify plans and goals and strategically prioritize next steps as well as leadership roles for the various attendees. Dot exercises, breakout groups and other group exercises can be helpful for this. If your community already has a Housing Production Plan or Housing Strategy, you can use this as a jumping off point.
- 3) Follow-up communication: Create an excel spreadsheet with all of the contacts you are gathering in this effort. You can explore creating a Google Group, Facebook page, website, or using MailChimp to facilitate ongoing communications.
- 4) **Take Action**: Ultimately, the goal of this work is to lead to action steps, but this will look different in every community. You may need to respond to actions and issues quickly as they arise, or you may be able to step back and set your own course and goals. Specific activities may include:
 - Creating buttons supporting affordable housing or specific projects
 - Turning out large numbers of supporters at Planning Board or City Council Meetings
 - Creating Town Meeting Warrant Guides to help voters understand affordable housing issues and how their votes might support that
 - Organizing affordable housing forums on general housing or specific topics, such as accessory dwelling units, recently released reports, or proposed actions in your community
 - Taking housing data and messages to various boards and commissions in your community to create allies
 - Writing op-eds and letters to the editor in support of your work
 - Tabling at community events to build support and hear community concerns
 - Writing letters of support on behalf of projects you support
 - Creating a Facebook page or website to get more interest, share interesting articles, and share facts
 - Create materials to distribute that educate the community about your strategies, such as a fact sheet about a project you are supporting or a policy you are advocating for

- Create materials to help dispel any myths and concerns they hear from friends and neighbors

The current MEI communities have begun to change the conversation and are supporting existing and future local efforts in favor of more housing and affordable housing production that may serve as an example of what you can accomplish or work on. Feel free to reach out to CHAPA or any of these groups directly to learn more.

- **Housing for All in Acton** supported the successful passage of 3 key initiatives at Spring Town Meeting, including an expansion of Accessory Dwelling Units and disposition of a town-owned parcel for affordable housing
 - **Housing Medford** supported the creation of Medford's first Inclusionary Zoning Ordinance and is elevating concerns about housing in local elections
 - **Engine 6** and **Livable Newton** are engaging more diverse groups in their support of significant developments at Riverside, Northland and across the city
 - The **Amherst Affordable Housing Coalition** successfully advocated for allocation of CPA funds to support new affordable housing by Valley CDC
 - The **Housing in Essex Coalition** is engaging in more conversations about affordable housing, housing in its downtown district, and housing's impacts on local business and advocating for passage of a Downtown Mixed-Use Village District
 - In Arlington, **Equitable Arlington** is working to bring more residents together around increased affordability and mixed-use development, including looking at zoning changes
- 5) **Be consistent.** Outcomes and successes in each community will look different, but this work gets done as a result of consistent meetings, developing trust and relationships among coalition members, and creating the group infrastructure to respond in a timely way to developments and opportunities in your community.

CHANGE HAPPENS WHEN COMMUNITIES COME TOGETHER.

CONTACT

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CHAPA Municipal Engagement Initiative

Potential Key Stakeholders

Below is a list to begin brainstorming individuals and organizations who might take part in building a housing coalition to change the conversation and support existing and future local efforts in favor of more affordable housing production.

- Housing Authority
- Planning Board
- Town/City Council Member
- Environmentalist Groups
- Religious Leaders
- School Representative
- Council on Aging
- Veterans Agency
- Transit Advocates
- Walk/Bike Advocates
- Commission on Disabilities
- Fair Housing groups
- Private Developers
- Non-profit housing developers
- Social Services
- Civic Groups (i.e. League of Women Voters)
- Interfaith Organizations
- Cultural Groups
- Residents (particularly active ones)
- Tenant Advocates
- Chamber of Commerce or other Business Leaders

You know your community better than anyone else. If there are others that are critical thought leaders, civic leaders, or people who get things done in your community, you should invite them to be at the table as well.



SAMPLE AGENDA

Housing in Brookline Stakeholders Meeting

Wednesday, December 18, 2019, 7:00-9:00 PM

Denny Room, Brookline Public Health Building

1. Welcome and Introductions
 - a. Reason for Convening
 - b. What is CHAPA's Municipal Engagement Initiative?
 - c. Who is in the room and why?
2. What is Brookline's Housing Story?
 - a. Data sharing
 - b. Highlights of Brookline's Housing Production Plan
3. What is keeping housing and affordable housing from getting built in Brookline?
 - a. Key barriers
 - b. Concerns you hear about housing production in your conversations with others
4. What can this group be for Brookline?
 - a. What do you think this group can and should focus on?
 - b. How can we get more people's attention on housing?
 - c. Who is missing from the room/conversation?
5. Next Steps
 - a. Ongoing meeting
 - b. Communication among groups
 - c. Spring Forum
6. Information Sharing
 - a. Upcoming events and activities
 - b. How can we all stay connected with each other's efforts?