

CHAPA
COVID-19 Affordable Housing Response Meeting
Friday, March 27, 2020 at 2:30 – 4:00 p.m.

For the most updated information on affordable housing and the COVID-19 crisis, visit: <https://www.chapa.org/housing-news/covid-19-affordable-housing-updates>

Notes

Welcome

Rachel Heller, CEO, CHAPA

Eric Shupin, Director of Public Policy, CHAPA

Heller and Shupin welcomed everyone on the call and reiterated CHAPA's intention to keep the community informed and updated on all housing and non-housing issues and resources.

State Updates

Mike Kennealy, Secretary of Housing and Economic Development

Kennealy thanked the COVID-19 Response Command Center, the cross-agency partnership coordinating the COVID-19 responses, and highlighted the most recent response actions to assure housing stability, including DHCD guidance on temporary suspension of termination of state and federal housing vouchers and guidance to state aided low income housing owners urging suspension of non-essential evictions, including pending evictions. Kennealy reported that DOB has issued guidance to Massachusetts financial institutions and lenders advocating for a 60-day stay on foreclosures. MassHousing has launched a COVID-19 Rental Assistance for Families in Transition (RAFT) fund of \$5M to assist families facing rent insecurity. Regarding shelters, the Command Center is coordinating with the Housing Consumer Education Centers across the state to streamline delivery of services and supplies to shelters. Further information on each of these actions can be found by clicking [here](#) and scrolling to State Updates.

Underscoring the critical housing shortage faced by the Commonwealth prior to the COVID-19, Kennealy indicated that the administration has issued guidance to municipalities on the continuation of construction, deemed an essential service, while ensuring proper safety and health precautions at all construction sites.

On the economic development side, Kennealy noted the formation of the small business loan fund recently announced by Governor Baker as well as expanded unemployment insurance. DOB has issued guidance to financial institutions and lenders on flexibility with their commercial customers.

Jennifer Maddox Undersecretary, Department of Housing & Community Development

Maddox emphasized that DHCD staff are working remotely to assure our most vulnerable populations have access to stable housing. The Division of Housing

Development, under Kate Racer, is monitoring 85 current development sites, the Division of Public Housing, under Ben Stone, is managing ongoing communication with local housing authorities, including the status of essential/non-essential projects, income loss and protocols around handling of COVID-19 cases and the Division of Housing Stabilization, under Ita Mullarkey, is coordinating shelter efforts with MEMA and DPH to stay current and facile on addressing immediate and changing needs.

Federal Update

Ryan Dominguez, Senior Policy Analyst, CHAPA

Dominguez reported that President Trump signed into law the \$2T Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act (CARES) stimulus package to respond to COVID-19 crisis providing economic relief for families, workers and businesses. \$12.4B of funding is directed to homelessness and housing stability and includes funds for homelessness assistance, tenant and project based rental assistance, public housing operating costs, housing for the elderly, housing for persons with disabilities and funds for community development block grants. For specific funding levels for each category, please click [here](#) and scroll to National Updates.

The legislation extends forbearance measures to all multifamily housing owners for up to 90 days, provided they suspend tenant evictions and applies to properties securitized by Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac. A 120-day moratoria on all evictions includes properties financed under rural housing programs and the Violence Against Women Act, expanding the protection for all populations.

CHAPA is advocating for much needed housing resources for the next recovery package. Dominguez reported on calls that he had with members of the Massachusetts Federal Delegation, that included MAPC, the Mass Alliance of HUD tenants and others. As the next relief package is put together, CHAPA anticipates advocating for LIHTC extensions for placed in service deadlines and other key dates, eviction and foreclosure protections for undocumented residents, additional direct funding to states, additional funds for housing counseling services and extensions for tenant income certification on all acquisition/rehab projects. Rodriguez urged everyone to reach out to their legislators supporting these vital resources.

Home Ownership Updates

Tom Callahan, Executive Director Massachusetts Affordable Housing Alliance

Callahan offered an overview of initiatives available to help homebuyers impacted by COVID-19. With respect to mortgage forbearance, he noted that lenders are encouraged to proactively reach out to customers in determining who might be having trouble with payments. Nevertheless, he urged homeowners to proactively reach out to their lenders and servicers regarding mortgage payment and forbearance issues. He emphasized that forbearance plans are not a permanent payment holiday. Those who are receiving income should continue to make their mortgage or rent payments.

Callahan further noted that the Division of Insurance recently issued similar guidance to the DOB on waiver of late fees, extension of deadlines and a halt to policy cancellations. In addition to the Fannie and Freddie guidance discussed, all MassHousing MI Plus mortgages offer guarantees of up to six months of mortgage payments at \$2K per month. He noted that 91% of non-FHA borrowers will be able to avail themselves of this provision. In sum, Callahan summarized MAHA's five point "best practice" forbearance plans in the financial industry: easy of application, no late fees, no negative credit, no burdensome paperwork and escrow deferral.

Clark Ziegler, Executive Director of Massachusetts Housing Partnership
Echoing Callahan, Ziegler noted the importance of communicating with lenders. Ziegler stated that most lenders have been responsive to the needs of homeowners and are offering forbearance. In the short term, up to 90-days, lenders see the crisis as manageable. What comes after is uncertain and may require looking at loan loss reserves. Ziegler noted that the home ownership and rental benefits contained in the federal stimulus are generous and will replace disrupted income to some extent. However, it is important to keep our attention on populations that continue to be vulnerable to housing instability.

Maureen Flynn, Deputy Director of the City of Boston's Home Center
Flynn echoed Callahan and indicated that the City will issue guidance/best lending practices during the COVID-19 crisis. She noted that deferral of mortgage payments will need to be made up sooner rather than later. Flynn pointed out that FHA borrowers do not yet have the benefit of FHA guidance that is sorely needed. Flynn directed those who want additional information to the City of Boston Home Center's website which can be found here. at: <https://www.boston.gov/departments/neighborhood-development/boston-home-center>.

Regional Updates

Jay Coburn, CEO, Community Development Partnership, Cape Cod
Coburn emphasized that CDP continues to work on housing and small business issues impacting its clients during the COVID-19 crisis. CDP is connecting residents to available homelessness prevention resources. Systematic outreach to clients indicates that families feel they can make April rent payment but are concerned about economic security after April. Of particular concern is the seasonal Cape Cod economy and the likelihood of severe economic impact as the crisis continues. As an example, the shellfish industry is hard hit because of the closure of restaurants not only on the Cape but in all of Massachusetts. CDP is offering interest only loan payments to its small business clients as well as some technical assistance. From a policy perspective, Coburn needs resources to increase staffing. He indicates that many programs such as RAFT and unemployment assistance, despite operating remotely, still require in person actions in Hyannis which is 50 miles away.

Juan Bonilla, Deputy Director, Lawrence Community Works, Merrimac Valley
Bonilla underscored concerns expressed by Coburn to assure that all vulnerable populations are accounted for and assured delivery of health, food and housing resources. Bonilla stated that LCW is continuing to adapt and update the implementation of resources. LCW maintains phone outreach to its clients and Bonilla reports that 50% of respondents report hardship.

LCW is implementing remote systems to deliver needed community services, including google classrooms and online job training programs for people to use during isolation and downtimes. Additionally, the local office of United Way will be launching a privately funded initiative to provide gift cards to its clients in need.

In closing, Bonilla expressed a concern shared by others that despite deployment of resources some populations will fall through the cracks. In Lawrence, that population includes many undocumented residents. LCW will continue looking at protocols and prioritizing those with no other resources. He urges everyone to “remember our staffs as they are struggling as well. We are all human and everyone is in this together.”

State Policy Update

Eric Shupin, Director of Public Policy, CHAPA

Shupin echoed Kennealy in summarizing current DHCD, DOB, MassHousing policies relating to eviction and foreclosure moratoria, rental assistance, resources for landlords and immediate PPE, supplies and services for shelters. Looking forward, Shupin indicated that CHAPA, in conjunction with its partners, will continue to advocate for additional resources for people experiencing homelessness, permanent supportive housing, individual shelter needs including staffing, supplies and additional space for social distancing and quarantining. CHAPA will be convening a group of multifamily property owners to determine what resources will be needed to assure the continued operation and maintenance of multifamily properties. We will continue to work with those at the federal, state and local levels to support resources to assure the affordable housing delivery system for all populations remains strong.

Shupin indicated that the state legislature is still in session in “emergency response mode.” He urged everyone to reach out to their legislators and ask them for quick passage on tenant and homeowner protections. The state budget process has been upended and a significant revenue loss is expected. Without knowing how the budget process will change, Shupin is certain that this year’s budget process will be like no other.

Discussion / Q&A

Next Steps

Next meeting scheduled for Friday, April 3rd from 2:30-3:30 p.m.