



## 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 residents, business owners, neighborhood and civic groups, cultural organizations, 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 requiring ongoing, long-term assistance. Through MEI Lite, CHAPA helps each partner 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. Since March 2020, we have successfully hosted several launch meetings virtually over Zoom in communities across the state.

- 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 (your community)!**  
**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 our housing needs? 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, 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) Welcome and Framing:**

Why are we all here? To come to a shared understanding of the housing challenges in your community, and to organize to create more affordable housing opportunities. To create a broad constituency for affordable housing in your 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 goals.

**2) Introductions:**

We always ask everyone in the meeting to introduce themselves, what groups or interests they represent, and why they felt compelled to participate. It is important to give people the opportunity to get to know one another and their perspectives. We use a number of different icebreakers and other activities to facilitate this conversation in a succinct amount of time.

**3) Housing Data and Housing Stories:**

Next, we frame the discussion by sharing some basic housing data, such as – how has the population shifted in the past few decades, and how many new homes have been built in that period? 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:**

The remainder of the meeting acts as a group brainstorm session. We ask people to share, from their point of view, what the barriers are that prevent more affordable housing from being built in their community. Oftentimes these barriers take the form of false perceptions and misinformation, but there may be other valid concerns that need to be mitigated. Depending on the size of the group, we may break into several groups or arrange a partner activity so that everyone participates.

**5) Identifying Opportunities:**

Once we have a shared understanding of the barriers, we are better able to brainstorm opportunities. If community residents have been getting inaccurate information, maybe there is an opportunity for education and outreach. If there is an active and vocal opposition group, maybe there is an opportunity for narrative reframing. Meeting attendees will often offer up their own skills, connections and services to support these efforts.

## **6) Committing to Take Action:**

Before we conclude the launch meeting, we want to ask folks how they imagine moving forward. The questions we ask include: Who is missing from the room? Are you willing to meet again? Would you be interested in meeting on a regular basis? Is anyone willing to commit to any specific tasks or action items before we meet again? We absolutely do not require that participants make any commitments, but we encourage folks to start thinking about next steps while we are all still together.

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.

## **After the Launch -- 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. Tools like Doodle and When2Meet are helpful for this. If resources were requested or referenced in the meeting, provide links or attachments. Below is an example follow-up meeting, drafted by our Brewster Housing Coalition:

## Example Follow-up Email

“Greetings!

Last week's Brewster Housing Coalition kick-off meeting left us feeling energized and excited. During Thursday's session, we heard from an array of voices -- housing veterans and new advocates alike -- all with a commitment to taking action in support of affordable housing in our community.

This initiative began with a partnership between the [Community Development Partnership \(CDP\)](#) and [Citizens' Housing and Planning Association \(CHAPA\)](#). A core group of interested community members was identified to help launch a version of CHAPA's [Municipal Engagement Initiative](#) here in Brewster, and from there more folks (like yourself!) were invited to take part. This initial group and meeting were only the beginning -- all are welcomed to take part as the Brewster Housing Coalition's efforts and mission take shape.

Though Brewster has four existing boards and committees and a part-time Housing Coordinator tasked with housing-related issues, we feel the current Cape housing crisis warrants even greater attention. We see the Brewster Housing Coalition as unique. Operating outside of the official municipal structure, we can act with more agility, advocate with greater urgency, and incorporate a greater diversity of perspectives. With important projects on the horizon, such as the potential construction of affordable rental units on Town land between Ocean Edge Golf Course and Millstone Road, and the update of the Town's Housing Production Plan (2022), it will be essential to have an organized group in place, ready to make our voices heard at town meetings and at the ballot box.

For those unable to attend, last Thursday's kick-off meeting included brief introductions of attendees, a presentation from CHAPA on housing and demographic conditions in Brewster, a discussion of current concerns, as well as a brainstorming session about what a housing coalition could look like in our town and what it might achieve. In the coming months, we plan to convene periodically as we broaden and build our coalition, and establish goals and a mission.

This group is open to everyone who has an interest in supporting housing in Brewster! We welcome you to share this email widely, and to invite any individuals or groups to join in the conversation. We want to ensure that the greatest range of voices and perspectives from our community are represented!

Anyone can join our contact list by reaching out to us at [brewsterhousingcoalition@gmail.com](mailto:brewsterhousingcoalition@gmail.com).

Looking forward, we are tentatively scheduling our next meeting for the end of August. We will be featuring a presentation from Brewster's own Housing Coordinator, Jill Scalise, on the various projects and efforts the town is currently engaged in. We hope to see you then (via Zoom)!

Brewster Housing Coalition”

## **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.

- a) 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.
- b) 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.
- c) 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 Medford** supported the creation of Medford's first Inclusionary Zoning Ordinance and is elevating concerns about housing in local elections
- The **Amherst Affordable Housing Coalition** successfully advocated for allocation of CPA funds to support new affordable housing by Valley CDC
- **Revere Housing Coalition** successfully advocated for the creation of an Affordable Housing Trust Fund

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.***





## 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
- Walk/Bike/Transit 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
- Black Lives Matter and other Racial Justice orgs

**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?

## CONTACT US

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