



Building Blocks Coalition May 28th, 2020

Notes

- I. Welcome & Introductions
- II. Budget Landscape & State House Updates**
 - a. Revenue
 - i. Mary Tittman from Mass budget indicated FY21 tax revenue are estimated to be short by \$4.4 billion to \$5.7 billion range below the modest benchmark established in early calendar year 2020.¹
 - ii. With the revenue shortfall, challenges with state budget process to move forward, advocacy for federal funds is crucial in preserving Housing programs.
 - iii. The process of allocation of federal funds is still unclear, advocacy is needed to weigh in on the process, distribution and effective use of federal funds for affordable housing.
 - iv. An [op-ed by economists](#) Alan Clayton-Matthews, Michael Goodman and Alicia Sasser-Modestino who argue that avoiding budget cuts through targeted tax increases is the best way to build a strong recovery in Massachusetts. This policy needs to be discussed further before Building Blocks can finalize their position.
 - b. State House Updates
 - i. The FY2021 budget could be a monthly budget or a quarterly budget, this is still being finalized by the Legislature. The budget may be pre-conferenced and may have limited opportunity for additional funding for programs.
 - ii. Building Blocks needs to proceed with the FY2021 Budget asks to ensure the programs are adequately funded.

¹ <https://www.jdsupra.com/legalnews/the-sobering-truth-behind-covid-19-s-68164/>

- c. FY2020 Supplemental Budget filed by Governor Baker
 - i. On May 12, Governor [Baker filed a \\$1 billion supplemental budget for spending related to COVID-19](#). The Governor plans for the federal government to reimburse the state for the supplemental budget through FEMA to cover the costs of expenses for disaster response activities.
 - ii. Details of specific line item allocations of the Supplemental budget are unknown. The state public housing authorities are slated to receive \$13.5 million while individual and family shelters to receive \$2 million through the Supplemental Budget.
 - iii. CHAPA will advocate to the legislature for including some of the Building Blocks budget priorities in the Supplemental Budget

III. Discussion on FY2020 Budget Priorities & Federal funds

- a. [Through the CARES Act, many federal funds were made available to Massachusetts state and local governments including CDBG, ESG, CRF, and more.](#)
- b. [Other states have leveraged CRF funds for housing assistance.](#)
- c. Currently, the Baker administration is working to distribute the state funds. There is a lack of clarity on which agency is leading the charge on funds of distribution, both on a state and local level.
- d. Advocacy is needed to ensure the effective distribution of these funds and to leverage them to fill gaps in the state budget funding for programs.
- e. Laurie Massie from GBLIS indicated that organizations working on homelessness prevention are advocating to expand HomeBASE. Federal funds like ESG and FEMA funds can support that expansion. Specifically, there is:
 - i. Need for specific steps to provide statewide coordination or set statewide goals about de-densification of family congregate shelters or to set policies about ascertaining which families are at particularly high risk due to underlying health conditions and therefore should be prioritized for de-densified units.
 - ii. Need to provide COVID-preventative safe shelter options for families who are not eligible for EA (again, with an eye towards reducing the public health threat of having these families staying in doubled-up situations, as for example has been highlighted repeatedly in Chelsea as an extreme public health risk factor)
 - iii. Need to continue HomeBASE stipends and stabilization services that otherwise would end during the state of emergency for an additional 12 months in situations where families cannot afford market rent; de-couple RAFT & HomeBASE.

- f. Joel Wool from Boston Housing Authority pointed out that [CARES Act has provided some funding for Tenant and Project based rental assistance \(Sec 8\)](#). There is funding available for Federal public housing but need funds for state public housing.

IV. Conclusion

- a. Building Blocks will proceed with advocacy for FY2021 with updated allocations and policy changes.
- b. Need for discussion and efforts on advocacy for Federal funds allocation for housing programs.