

Meeting Notes



Small Town Housing Working Group

Date: Thursday, January 19, 2023

Time: 5:30-7:00 p.m.

Location: Remote meeting

Staff Contact: Andrea Donlon, adonlon@frcog.org (413)774-3167 (ext. 127)

Working Group Webpage: <https://frcog.org/boards-committees/small-town-housing-workgroup/>

Upcoming meeting dates: March 16, May 18, July 20 (field trip/in person?), September 21, November 16 (*all Thursdays 5:30-7 PM*)

Attendees:

Jen Audley, notetaker (FRCOG staff, FC/NQ CHIP)	Gina Govoni (FCRHRA / RDI)
Marybeth Chichester (Colrain Planning Board)	Nevin Murray (FCCLT, Greenfield/Leverett)
Jerry Lund (Franklin Regional Planning Board)	Judy Atkins (FCCLT)
Andrea Donlon (FRCOG planning staff, Buckland PB)	Dana LeWinter (CHAPA)
Mike Shaffer (FRCOG Executive Committee, frmr Erving PB)	Lily Linke (CHAPA)
Megan Rhodes (FRCOG)	David Greenberg (Colrain PB/FCCLT)
Nathan Chung (Northampton/Holyoke)	Mary McClintock (frmr Conway PB)

FRCOG updates

Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) update - Megan Rhodes, FRCOG (mrhodes@frcog.org)

The RTP is a 20-year plan that is updated every 4 years. Transportation is defined broadly-- "anything that moves people." There are many links between housing and transportation. For an overview of the process and progress on the current (2020) RTP, see [Franklin County Regional Transportation Plan \(RTP\) Update \(arcgis.com\)](#) Public participation is an element of the updating process and there are multiple ways to give input, including a survey, an interactive map, and an online public meeting on Feb 15, 5:30-7PM. Details here: [Public Input Needed for the Update to the Franklin County Regional Transportation Plan – FRCOG](#)

Water & Sewer Infrastructure Study, 2022 – Andrea Donlon

Housing planning in our region is somewhat tied to whether an area has water and sewer infrastructure. FRCOG recently published an existing conditions/ future needs assessment of water and sewer in the county completed by Tighe & Bond. A summary is available here: [Franklin County Water and Wastewater Study – FRCOG](#) Contact Jessica Atwood – jatwood@frcog.org – for more information, or to inquire about access to the maps.

Ongoing and upcoming work by FRCOG on zoning and housing – Andrea Donlon

FRCOG has defined a scope of work for a zoning-related project under the Massachusetts Housing Partnership's Complete Neighborhoods grant. It will assess zoning in the 6 towns that were awarded the grant (Greenfield, Montague, Orange, Erving, Whately, Deerfield), look at building permitting process in each town, and develop a zoning toolkit, using MHP's housing toolkit as a base, but adapting or adding to focus on tools that are a fit for small towns and rural settings. This should take about a year to complete.

Under the IH2 grant that is ongoing, Andrea will also look at zoning for housing for the rest of the towns. It should be relatively easy to link that with toolkit recommendations developed for Complete Neighborhoods grant.

Also, a proposal to update a regional housing plan for the county – last done in 2014 – is under consideration for DLTA this year. FRCOG is developing the scope of work now. This update would include public outreach to increase understanding and support for housing development in the context of our county's needs. The 2014 Study report is here - [Franklin County Regional Housing Study \(frcog.org\)](http://frcog.org)

Andrea is also working on updating short-term rental tables for Franklin County through the end of 2022. There has been some back and forth with the Dept. of Revenue on the data, but at some point soon we'll have a new summary of STRs and tax revenues for Franklin County towns. (Links to a presentation on STRs, the tables and original report here, under "2022 Materials": [Small Town Housing Workgroup – FRCOG](#))

Other updates

Regional Community Land Trusts Network – Nevin Murray nvmurray@gmail.com

Equity Trust and Amherst Community Land Trust hosted an initial gathering of people who are working on/for community-controlled land and housing in the Connecticut River Valley which generated a working group that's developing a survey. Contact Nevin to get connected to this effort.

New staff coming to CHAPA's Municipal Engagement Initiative – Lily Linke is moving into a new role at CHAPA focused on supporting MBTA Communities, and candidates for the role she's moving out of (Municipal Engagement Associate) are being interviewed now. They are asking about experience working in smaller towns and rural communities. Dana LeWinter dlewinter@chapa.org will be the contact for Franklin County work while the new person gets acclimated.

Housing Security resources research – Mary McClintock - mclinto@verizon.net

Mary is trying to learn more about resources and tools that could help people at risk of being displaced from their homes as a result of rising costs and emergency expenses. The topic came up at recent Housing Greenfield meeting related to sudden, dramatic increases in rents reported in Greenfield. Mary is also looking for examples of help in situations where a non-housing emergency is the catalyst – for example, an unexpected car breakdown that results in a big repair bill and inability to get to work. The group named the Interfaith Alliance as a local resource, and a community-based mutual aid group in a neighboring county. Please reach out to Mary if you have further thoughts!

FCRHRA/RDI updates – Gina Govoni – ggovoni@fcrhra.org

Sanderson Place, which will add 33 units of affordable senior housing to the region’s inventory in Sunderland, got its certificate of occupancy on January 18 and the first eight tenants will move in next week, with the rest following through March. There will be a public event in the spring.

In Greenfield, there’s a proposal to use CDBG funding to help with the temporary relocation of shelter services from 60 Wells Street while the facility is under construction in 2023/2024.

RDI has also recently acquired funding that will help them start a non-profit receivership program. This should result in more properties eligible for rehab through the AGO’s Neighborhood Renewal program coming back on the market as affordable housing in our area. The first project for RDI is on Cleveland St in Greenfield.

Habitat for Humanity Affordable Homeownership opportunities in Northampton – Megan McDonough
megan@pvhabitat.org

Jen Audley reported that Pioneer Valley Habitat for Humanity is pleased to announce that applications are available for three affordable, three-bedroom, single-family homes to be built in Northampton, MA. The application deadline is Wednesday March 8th, 2023. Eligible applicants will have incomes up to 60% of area median income (adjusted for family size).

People interested in submitting an application, are invited to attend one of the following Zoom information sessions to learn more: Saturday January 28, 2023 at 10am, Monday February 13, 2023 at 6pm, Wednesday March 1, 2023 at 6pm. During the information session, potential applicants will learn about Habitat’s selection criteria and how to prepare a complete application. More information can be found at <https://www.pvhabitat.org/apply/>

Montague Comprehensive Planning public engagement opportunities – Jen Audley

Montague is working with the FRCOG to update its Comprehensive Plan and will hold a community visioning workshop in person at Turners Falls High School on Saturday, Feb 4 and a priority-setting workshop online on Thursday, March 9. (Comprehensive Plans typically include a section on housing, plus various related topics.) Please encourage people you know who are connected to Montague to get involved! More info here: <https://montagueplans.org/> and here: <https://montague-ma.gov/n/230/Comprehensive-Plan--Community-Workshop-Invitation>

Marybeth Chichester noted that Colrain is considering a master plan update and recommended looking at Williamstown’s process: <https://resilience.mysocialpinpoint.com/williamstown-comprehensive-plan>

Legislative and funding updates – Andrea Donlon

New administration.

Governor Healey has said she will create a Housing Secretary position. Elevating housing to a Cabinet-level role and brining it out from under the umbrella of DHCD is a structural change that has been wanted for a

long time. This requires legislation to create the position, so it will take a bit more time, but in the meantime Jennifer Maddox, an undersecretary at the Department of Housing and Community Development under Baker, is serving as acting secretary

Jo Comerford and Natalie Blais met recently with Healey administration and have shared the list of programmatic and regulatory changes that was developed in the wake our last meeting:

Rural-Friendly changes to certain state housing programs at the MA Executive Office of Housing and Economic Development (EOHED) and the MA Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) The following revisions would help make rural municipalities eligible and more competitive for state funding for housing and affordable housing:

- *Create a rural set-aside in the [Community Scale Housing Initiative](#) (a joint program of DHCD and MassHousing);*
- *Rebrand the [40R Starter Home Zoning](#) to reflect the needs of new homeowners and seniors looking to downsize;*
- *Simplify 40R to make it easier for towns with no planning staff to implement, and to be more adaptable to a town's existing zoning;*
- *Create a rural set-aside in the [Qualified Allocation Plan](#). This could come from multiple funding sources, and would allow for flexibility in Total Dev Cost per unit caps, for instance. Other states have rural set asides in their QAPs, so this is not something unheard of.*
- *Include a provision for rural areas such as Greenfield, Montague and Orange in programs that are currently limited to Gateway Cities, such as the [Commonwealth Builder](#).*

Comerford and Blais are committed to making sure that rural perspectives and needs are included in the new administration's work on housing. When there's a Housing Secretary, they have said they will bring that person out to meet with us.

Legislation

Bill filing deadline for the new legislative session is this week.

Via Susan Worgaftik - The Local Option for Housing Affordability (LOHA) Coalition submitted the first version (there always are many) of the transfer fee bill, which Jo Comerford will sponsor. A brief summary: The transfer fee bill would allow municipalities to levy a one-time fee on the sale of real property for the purpose of supporting affordable housing. This is a local option, so no community would be required to opt in. The municipality would make the decision about which parties would pay the transfer fee...the buyer, the seller, split by both. The fee would be between 0.5% and 2% of the sale price above the regional median. For example, if the median sale price in Franklin County is \$300,000 for a single family home, and the home sold were for \$350,000, the transfer fee would only be applied to the \$50,000 above the median. In actual dollars, this would amount to \$500 if the fee were set at 1%.

The bill now includes the possibility of a "regional housing commission" as an entity for accepting the transfer fee. With this, our small communities will be able to pool the fees for the purpose of providing affordable

housing regionally and also have only one entity that would be dealing with this issue. While communities would have to vote in the transfer fee ordinance for their town, once that is done, the commission would be the ones dealing with the income and disbursement of any fee income. The communities would decide who is on the commission and what its duties would be. Legislation for regional housing commissions would have to be written after this bill is passed. But the idea here is that regional commissions would be able to fashion this entity to meet regional needs.

Dana LeWinter – Expect CHAPA’s legislative and budget priorities announcement soon. Housing bond bill and expanding MA Rental Voucher Program will be included.

David Greenberg – Franklin County Continuing the Political Revolution has been in conversation with Senator Paul Mark, who will file a bill related to establishing a regional affordable housing trust and is involved in Green Bank initiative which would bring \$300 million in federal funds for green building and transportation projects such as incentives for solar and electric charging stations.

Funding Opportunities

[Rural and Small Town Development Fund](#). (under One-Stop) Relatively new grant offered since FY2022 – two rounds so far. Get in touch with your town administrator/SB if you want to push an idea for this grant.

Examples of funded projects:

Current round

- Charlemont. The Town of Charlemont will bring two subdivision roads up to the standard of the town's gravel roads to encourage economic development in town through the lots in these subdivisions. This will allow for development and future paving. \$395,500.00
- Lenox. The Town of Lenox will conduct design and engineering for sewer expansion and creation in North Lenox to serve a 65-unit mixed-income rental housing project, developable land zoned for mixed-use, commercial or multi-family development, existing businesses, and at least 100 homes currently on dated septic systems. The design and engineering work will consider feasibility, alternatives, partial design and ID-ready documents. \$181,200.00
- Becket. The Town of Becket will create an affordable homeownership unit to replace a hazardous blighted property. Becket has chosen a non-profit receiver to redevelop the existing hazard and build a modular home. \$145,000.00

Previous round

- Erving. Updating the current zoning bylaws to be more comprehensive, add in measures to encourage a diversity of housing options including affordable ones, encourage commercial and industrial development in appropriate areas, and eliminate any redundancies and errors. While the Town has been attempting to do this work piecemeal on our own, this application is for funding to pay a consultant to do a comprehensive overhaul. This would ensure that no mistakes are made, the results are professional, and easily accessible online. \$60,000.00
- Town of Orange and Town of Whately – Housing Production Plans

MassHousing Planning for Housing Production program

FRCOG staff recently met with staff from MassHousing who reached out to us to let us know that they will soon be launching a grant round. Funds for pre-development work for town-owned sites that are suitable for housing development. There will be a 10% local match, and any town can apply.

Topics for upcoming meetings

Gina Govoni and Alyssa Larose have been invited to give us an overview of RDI's work – possibly at our next meeting. Please let Andrea know if you have topics you would like to explore or present on!

Time	Agenda Item	Presenter
5:30 pm	1. Welcome	
5:35 pm	2. Various FRCOG updates & connections to housing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Updates to Regional Transportation Plan • Water & Sewer Infrastructure Study, 2022 • Ongoing and upcoming work on zoning and housing 	Megan Rhodes, FRCOG Andrea Donlon, FRCOG
6:00	3. Housing updates and priorities for 2023 from around the county	Group
6:30	4. Legislative, Healey Administration, and funding updates	Andrea Donlon (& others)
6:45 pm	5. Discussion topics for upcoming meetings in 2023: what do you want to learn more about?	Group
7:00 pm	6. Adjourn	Group