

2012 NCSHA Annual Awards for Program Excellence
Category: Special Achievement

Housing Awareness Program

BACKGROUND

The New Hampshire Housing Finance Authority (NHHFA) was established to promote, finance and support affordable housing opportunities and related services for New Hampshire families and individuals, thereby contributing to the economic and social development of the State and its communities. Recognizing that there will never be sufficient public subsidies available to meet the housing needs identified in the state, NHHFA has broadened its focus to include *education and advocacy in an effort to increase the diversity of market rate housing available in the state*. This was a decision consciously made by the Authority and reflects its leadership's understanding of the impact of local land use controls on the cost and supply of affordable housing and the important role played by municipal decision makers.

Zoning changes are still fiercely resisted at the municipal level and work must continue to provide information and education to overcome obstacles. With the current reduced state of housing prices, there is a false perception is that housing affordability is no longer an issue. The Housing Awareness Program, both directly and through its partners, is devoted to helping educate public officials, local employers, and private citizens about the serious and ongoing affordability situation facing our state's housing market.

New Hampshire's political structure provides additional challenges:

- Our State Legislature consists of 400 Representatives and 24 Senators, making the NH General Court the second largest legislature in the United States following the U.S. Congress.
- There is no county form of government that supports regional planning efforts.
- Use of innovative land use techniques such as Inclusionary Zoning are allowed but can not be mandated by a municipality.
- New Hampshire is not a home rule state but its municipalities fiercely defend "local land use control."
- Planning is largely conducted by locally elected citizen planners.
- There is no state funding for housing. NHHFA and its partners have been creative in finding ways to help facilitate the production of diverse housing for the state's workforce.
- The state is geographically diverse. Our population of 1.3 million people is spread out over 234 municipalities, with a median town population of 3,000.

With the unique political environment of New Hampshire and no state funding source, the goal of the Housing Awareness Program focuses on creating an understanding of the benefits of a diverse housing supply and knowledge of how to achieve it through local land use regulations.

HOUSING AWARENESS PROGRAM ACTIVITY

While New Hampshire is not a home rule state, the political ideology of the State's electorate has long favored local control. Regional Planning Commissions operate purely in an advisory role and county government does not oversee the activities of town and city land use and governing boards. The task of

promoting the creation of more diverse and affordable housing has required ongoing local education in order to produce positive changes in local land use regulations that support housing development.

The Housing Awareness Program (HAP) provides outreach, education and technical assistance to communities, civic organizations, local governing and land use boards and others that may have an interest in housing issues. The program works closely with partners such as the New Hampshire Business and Industry Association, Home Builders and Remodelers Association of NH, New Hampshire Municipal Association, local conservation groups, planners, developers, community leaders and local officials. The Housing Awareness Program also works closely with and helps coordinate efforts of six regional workforce housing coalitions.

Regional Workforce Housing Coalitions: The HAP program provides annual operating support to each coalition that, in turn, seeks support from local employers and individuals. NHHFA funding provides a catalyst for additional investment. We also support each coalition's efforts locally and HAP staff is often engaged in local events through the work of the coalitions. Data, research, messaging and other tools to help their efforts are routinely shared and HAP staff provide coordination of efforts by convening monthly meetings of coalition directors to discuss strategy, share ideas and feedback, and ultimately improve and enhance local education and advocacy efforts.

COMMUNICATIONS/MESSAGING

“Homes for New Hampshire’s Future”

This collateral material contains key housing messages and was designed to be customized and used by regional housing coalitions. Inserts cover diverse topics such as Housing and Economic Development, Conservation and Housing, and Housing and School Enrollment.

Workforce Housing Council Website (www.workforcehousingnh.com)

This website contains many of the tools and messages contained in the printed material previously described. It also provides an easy way to download educational materials and tools for use by housing advocates throughout the state.

“Meeting the Workforce Housing Challenge - A Guidebook for New Hampshire Municipalities”

was created to assist local land use boards. The Guidebook provides recommendations for analyzing a municipality's land use ordinances and regulations, and outlines approaches to understanding issues of economic viability, a component of the state's new workforce housing law.

Compact Design Videos

While higher density development is an important element in affordable housing creation, it often carries with it many negative perceptions, such as being inconsistent with New Hampshire's rural landscape. The videos are used in a variety of ways to engage the general public and local leaders.

In partnership with Plan-NH, a non-profit whose mission is to foster excellence in sustainable planning, design and development of the built environment, New Hampshire Housing funded the creation of a

separate initiative that now hosts this series of videos within a brand new website. Vibrant Villages takes the elements of compact design and places it as part of a broader conversation that includes New Hampshire livability principles. www.vibrantvillagesnh.org. (Click on the PLAY button to be directed to the videos.)

IMPACT

Workforce Housing Law: In 2008, the New Hampshire Legislature passed a landmark workforce housing statute requiring all of the state's communities to "provide reasonable and realistic opportunities" for the development of workforce housing affordable to families within an income range of 60% to 100% of AMI. For those engaged in housing education and advocacy, this was a victory that represented many years of hard work among a broad array of partners.

In the 2011 and 2012 legislative sessions bills were introduced that would have severely weakened the workforce housing law. Advocates moved into action, with regional coalitions seeking support from their employer constituents and community leaders as well as speaking with legislators directly. Support from the state's business community was instrumental in the workforce housing law's passage and even more so in defending it.

Favorable workforce housing zoning changes: Even before there was guidance from a state law, local housing advocates and the HAP program helped towns look at their ordinances and adopt more workforce friendly language. Towns such as Hanover, with a thriving economy based on assets such as Dartmouth College, Dartmouth-Hitchcock Hospital and other businesses; Amherst, one of the state's most affluent communities; and Conway, a tourist destination that drives demand for housing as seasonal accommodation and as a prime retirement location, began to look at the needs of their workforce and make zoning changes. In the past two years over 50 of the state's 234 municipalities have made regulatory changes in response. Many of these changes have been made with the assistance of the Housing Awareness Program, Regional Planning Commissions, and Regional Housing Coalitions.

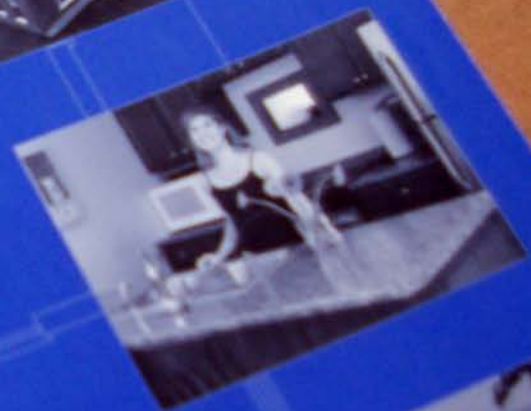
Land use board approvals of workforce housing developments: As a result of growing public acceptance and passage of favorable zoning laws, developers are finding that they are able to gain approvals for workforce housing developments in communities that have not traditionally been the homes for this sort of development. This is true of places such as Amherst, Brookline, Hooksett, Goffstown, Bow, Wolfeboro, Conway and Meredith, where local boards have in the past two years approved proposals for affordable and workforce housing.

Workforce Housing Created: In the last few years, approximately 276 units of workforce housing have been created with three more projects currently under construction. Many of these units have been built in locations that have historically seen strong demand with little production. The creation of this housing illustrates progress in the public's understanding of affordable/workforce housing and its positive impact on the state's economy and quality of life for its residents.

Homes for New Hampshire's Future



living room
12 x 20



Housing for a healthy economy
and strong communities.



Reed Court, Lebanon

A New Hampshire native, Jennifer is a mother of three adult children and teaches art at the middle school, while also pursuing a Master's degree and Spanish teaching certification. At Reed Court, a 24-unit townhouse development, she was able to purchase a larger home than she could afford to rent elsewhere. Overall, Reed Court is home to a variety of people—including professionals and seniors who are "downsizing."



Milview, Laconia

Lori and Dan live in the Milview Apartments in Laconia. Dan works for a major catalog retailer in nearby Tilton, while Lori develops community art programs for developmentally disabled people. They live there with their two youngest children. Milview is an award-winning project by the Laconia Area Community Land Trust. LACTL demolished an abandoned factory and replaced it with five attractive, colonial-style buildings containing 18 brand-new apartments for low and moderate income families.



Watson Woods, Exeter

Jen is the marketing director for a local corporation, and when a developer used Exeter's inclusionary zoning ordinance in Watson Woods to create 20 units of workforce housing as part of a larger development, she found that she was able to afford to buy her own home. Watson Woods is home to single professionals, young couples starting out, and two small families. The homes are Energy Star compliant, and the development includes substantial conservation land with walking and biking trails.



Homes for New Hampshire's Future

Easier Homes, Less Business

It's not my concern...

For years, New Hampshire business leaders resisted the idea that they had a stake in the cost and supply of housing. This understandable response was founded in realistic assessments of their core missions—supplying goods or services. Increasingly, however, they have come to recognize that their plans for future success and growth are grounded in understanding issues that often go well beyond what their businesses do—issues such as health insurance, child care and transportation.

Where their employees live and what a house or apartment costs have become vital concerns for New Hampshire's employers. Without an adequate and diverse supply of housing that is affordable to a range of incomes, the state's business workers will be unable to retain current workers and to recruit new employees for expansion. In short, we will lose an important competitive advantage.

Responding to this concern, starting in 2001 in the Seacoast and the Upper Valley regions of the state, business leaders began to organize coalitions aimed at solving this common problem in the rapidly escalating cost of housing that wasn't keeping pace with demand.

Over the next five years, these and other regional coalitions statewide have worked to give voice to the concerns of business leaders at local planning and zoning hearings, in legislative testimony, and in the

MISSION
The New Hampshire Housing Council is an effort of numerous groups that are essential to a strong economy. It shows a significant additional reasonable working in raising our economic growth. The Council is a business future.

The New Housing Council

73% of the employers who reported "wage pressures" had an impact upon them in the prior year.

Housing is my concern!

A 2008 survey of almost one hundred New Hampshire employers identified concerns over the cost and availability of homes for their employees. Over 73% of them indicated that housing problems had affected their employees in the preceding year. Among these concerns, the most important were the cost and availability of housing, as well as its proximity to the workplace.

The latter concern—extended commuting distance—represents an important sacrifice that many workers must make in order to be able to find a place to live that is within their means. But most also have greater difficulty balancing their work and home responsibilities.

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What can I do?

You're not alone. Get involved in a regional housing coalition. See the map and contact information on the back.

Workforce Housing Council

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New Hampshire Housing

Meeting the Workforce Housing Challenge

A Guidebook for New Hampshire Municipalities



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