



Ways to Preserve and Create Housing Affordability

Sudden, dramatic removal of zoning constraints is hugely advantageous to those positioned to exploit the new opportunity – domestic and overseas corporate investment entities – and puts small property owners and their tenants at risk of displacement. Upzoning and Increasing supply of housing units does *not* lead to lower prices in desirable housing markets. Increased density is associated with higher housing prices. For-profit developers don't *ever* try to lower housing prices. Their redevelopment model is based on pushing rents and housing prices as high as possible because their only motive is maximizing profits. Well-managed municipalities protect constituents from property speculators and prioritize having a strong commercial tax base to pay for city schools, services and infrastructure, without having to rely on one-time revenue from “new growth” high-density redevelopment. Stability and sustainability - not unsustainable growth - make communities thrive.

To preserve and create housing affordability, Newton, like other municipalities, should target the approach to the needs of particular segments of the population, by doing the following:

1. **Preserve IN PERPETUITY ALL SHI-units.** These are officially recognized subsidized affordable units as determined by the EOHLC (formerly DHCD) available via lottery to qualified low-income and low-asset households. Don't allow units to “fall off” the SHI.
2. **Assert and defend Chapter 40B “Safe Harbor”** to regain local land use control, and leverage to extract more favorable terms when housing development is proposed.
3. **Choose non-profit developers for new projects containing SHI units** to remove the profit motive from the paradigm. Small-scale, 100%-SHI-in-perpetuity projects that fit into the scale and streetscapes of neighborhoods (like those done by CAN-DO) are best.
4. **Seek opportunities to buy state property** (like the Armory) to create 100% SHI-affordable-in perpetuity units for vulnerable residents and newcomers in Newton.
5. **Fund robust wrap-around support services for vulnerable households** including single parents, migrants and those with disabilities to help them with coaching and all paperwork to improve their health, educational, job and financial security prospects.

6. **Incentivize landlords to welcome Section 8 tenants.**
7. **Lobby the State** to allow more senior and assisted-living complexes to qualify as SHI units and for meeting overall State housing requirements.
8. **Property tax relief, not just deferral**, for seniors who wish to remain in their homes.
9. **Crack down on realtors who convince seniors to sell for less than their house is worth** because the agent has a commission to sell the high-priced replacement units from a developer who wants the senior's house on the cheap to demolish. Conflict of interest.
10. **Preserve naturally affordable housing.** Enforce strict zoning to constrain demolition of small ranches, bungalows, capes and other "starter homes" suitable for young families and downsizing seniors. Do the same with owner-occupied two-family houses where rental income for the tenant unit helps the owner pay the mortgage.
11. **Revise property taxes to incentivize, not penalize, home maintenance and upgrades** expenditures, as houses in disrepair or that lack modern amenities are teardown targets.
12. **Protect historic structures by incentivizing adaptive re-use** into naturally affordable or SHI affordable units. Better for the environment, historic preservation and housing.
13. **Assist 1st-time home buyers.** Work with local banks to promote down payment and mortgage assistance programs, and offer low-cost community education classes in financial literacy, homebuying and home ownership to demystify the process. Promote State programs like: [MyMassHome](https://www.mass.gov/info-details/my-mass-home)
14. **Use zoning to limit McMansions and unaffordable monster houses** to keep the community from becoming an enclave for only the rich.
15. **Rebuild the commercial tax base to generate local tax revenue**, rather than depending on one-time "new growth" revenue from housing redevelopment, which is ultimately a fiscal losing proposition.

