

Affordable Housing Study Reports

1. The Study & the Consensus Process

At the League of Women Voters of Massachusetts 2005 convention, members voted to investigate affordable housing in Massachusetts. The study was described as follows:

Scope: To evaluate legislation, regulations and programs in Massachusetts; to determine their effectiveness in providing affordable housing; and to propose a new position through consensus or concurrence.

Study may include, but is not limited to:

- Senior housing
- Effect of Chapter 40B, Massachusetts' Comprehensive Permit statute, on cities and towns
- "Smart growth" concepts

Study Committee

A study committee began meeting in the fall of 2005 and worked for the next two years researching affordable housing in Massachusetts and preparing information, conducting interviews, leading workshops, and distributing Bulletin and Voter articles to educate League members about the subject. The following reports are the results of the breadth and depth of their research.

The committee members are:

Wendy Manz, co-chair, Lexington
Jane Nash, co-chair, Westwood-Walpole
Joan Duff, Andover-North Andover
Clare Gordon, Arlington

Roberta Leviton, Newton
Mardie McKenna, Norwood
Muriel Zaginailoff, Beverly
Lynn Cohen, state board advisor, Westford

Consensus Question

Recognizing that affordable housing is a very large and extremely complex issue, committee members eventually narrowed the focus of the study to areas they believed League members could learn about and address at consensus meetings. In the spring of 2007, the LWVM board approved the following consensus question:

What changes to Massachusetts laws are needed to more successfully encourage the production and retention of affordable housing?

In discussing this question, please consider the following:

- a. Reasonableness and fairness of current eligibility requirements for purchase or rental of affordable housing in Massachusetts
- b. Method of counting affordable housing units under Chapter 40B
- c. Duration of affordability restrictions on housing units—in perpetuity, in perpetuity with some provisions for revision to market rate, or for a specified time
- d. Effectiveness of state incentive programs for smart growth and affordable housing, including Chapters 40R & 40S

The Consensus Process

In the League, consensus is reached if:

- a study committee has presented the information
- there has been member discussion
- a substantial number of participating members reach agreement

The consensus/group discussion as stated in the LWVUS's *In League*, "is the technique most often used in the League for reaching member agreement. It is a process whereby members participate in a group discussion of an issue. The 'consensus' reached by members through group discussion is not a simple majority, not is it unanimity; rather it is the overall 'sense of the group' as expressed through the exchange of ideas and opinions, whether in a membership meeting or a series of membership or unit meetings."

Acknowledgments

The League's Affordable Housing Study Committee is in debt to all those who helped us over the past 2½ years as we learned about affordable housing. We sincerely thank the following people for giving us generous amounts of their time, knowledge and expertise. The committee, however, is responsible for the accuracy of the information in these reports.

Judi Barrett
Policy Planner, Community Opportunities
Group, Inc
Chapter 40B consultant

Stephen Costello
Town Planner, Norwood

Mary Lou Fitzpatrick
Member, Norwood Housing Authority

Maura Fogarty
Assistant to Vice President for
Communications, Community Relations and
Public Affairs
The Boston Foundation

Kristine G. Foye
New England Regional Public Affairs
Director
U.S. Department of Housing and Urban
Development

Aaron Gornstein
Executive Director, Citizens' Housing and
Planning Association (CHAPA)

Toni Coyne Hall
Manager, Local Initiative Program
Massachusetts Department of Housing and
Community Development

Sandra Litchfield
Trainer in Microsoft Office Suite of
products
PC trainer and support

Stephen Merritt
Director, Norwood Housing Authority

Elaine Nickerson
Co-chair, Westford Affordable Housing
Committee

Jill Onderdonk
Member, Westwood Housing Authority
Member, Westwood Housing Partnership
Consultant on Local Initiative Planning
Projects

William Plasko
Assistant. Director, Norwood Housing
Authority

Darcy Rollins Saas
Policy Analyst, New England Public Policy
Center
Federal Reserve Bank of Boston

Susan Stott
Executive Director, Andover Community
Trust
Past member, Andover Housing Partnership
Committee

Ann Verrilli
Research Director, Citizens Housing &
Planning Agency

Eleanor White
Co-chair, Commonwealth Housing Task
Force
President, Housing Partners, Inc

Laura Wiener
Director of Housing, Planning Board
Arlington, MA

Sarah Young
Former Deputy Director for Policy
Development, Massachusetts Department of
Housing and Community Development