

LANCASTER AFFORDABLE HOUSING TRUST

Prescott Building
701 Main Street - Suite 2
Lancaster, MA 01523

October 28, 2021

CHAPA APPLICATION NARRATIVE

1) Market Conditions to Support Housing Production – Lancaster’s Housing Production Plan covers local market conditions and our community demographics. Both support the need and production of affordable housing. After being approved locally by the Planning Board and Select Board, Lancaster’s Housing Production Plan was certified by DHCD on March 11, 2019 and is valid through March 10, 2024. It is posted on-line on the Affordable Housing Trust’s public webpage at https://www.ci.lancaster.ma.us/sites/g/files/vyhlf4586/f/uploads/lancaster_housing_plan_2.21.19_-_organized.pdf

2) Additional Conditions Needed to Build Support – The Lancaster Affordable Housing Trust is a local advocacy group seeking CHAPA assistance to engage our residents and other stakeholders in affordable housing production. The Trust was approved at Lancaster’s annual town meeting in June 2020. After the Attorney General’s approval in September 2020, and appointments by the Select Board by year-end, the Trust formally began its work in January 2021.

We are working on several strong opportunities. We would like to concurrently bring local residents “up to speed” on the tangible need for affordable housing in our community, how this benefits all of us, and why negative housing stereotypes are misleading and harmful to everyone.

3) Evidence of Support by Municipality - The Affordable Housing Trust is a recognized and active participant in Lancaster’s municipal government. It is listed among the official boards and committees on the Town of Lancaster’s public website:

- a) Official Town Boards & Committees: <https://www.ci.lancaster.ma.us/boards>
- b) Affordable Housing Trust: <https://www.ci.lancaster.ma.us/affordable-housing-trust>

- 4) **Trigger** – The Trust is currently working a variety of opportunities in the short, medium, and long term. These include:
- a) Establishment a 40R Smart Growth Overlay District (very active project & short to medium term build-out of 150 rental units in Phase One);
 - b) Re-vitalizing a defunct 40B (active and short-term – 32 rental units);
 - c) Adaptive re-use of a state-owned DCAMM property (not active yet, medium to long term); and
 - d) Possible adaptive re-use of a vacant municipal school (Town has assigned a “Memorial School Re-Use Committee” to explore future use options; The Housing Trust an assigned representative member).
- 5) **Describe the Goals of Your Proposal** – The Housing Trust would like to build broad support for affordable housing production in Lancaster. The Town has recently experienced a controversial 40B and there is a mixed public view of the need and desirability of affordable housing. We would like to show examples of well-designed housing communities that are thoughtfully integrated in the community, and provide examples of anonymous resident profiles that help change stereotypes around income-eligible populations. We need guidance and solutions with best practice, marketing messages, and outreach tools. We need concrete progress in terms of materials – whether hands-on and/or web-based, influential and effective speakers, and other “thought leadership” help in our community.
- 6) **List any identified potential partners.** Lancaster joined the MetroWest Development Collaborative’s 8-Town consortium in late 2020. Named the Assabet Regional Housing Consortium (ARHC), it includes the towns of Bolton, Bolton, Boxborough, Devens, Harvard, Hudson, Lancaster, Littleton, and Stow. Based on a subscription membership, we benefit from quarterly webinars and sharing with our member towns. ARHC also maintains an overview of our Subsidized Housing Inventory. Technical assistance is available from MetroWest Collaborative Development at an additional cost based on a bespoke request. <https://metrowestcd.org/municipal-leaders/assabet-regional-housing-consortium/>

We are currently working with the Montachusett Regional Commission to establish a 40R Smart Growth Overlay District. They are providing assistance to the Affordable Housing Trust with writing the proposed bylaw and application submitted for DHCD approval and town meeting vote. Capital Group Properties, a landowner within the proposed 40R District, is working with the Affordable Housing Trust to design a mixed-use residential and commercial project within the proposed 40R District. Project tabs for the 40R bylaw and the proposed development are both available on the upper left corner of our webpage:

<https://www.ci.lancaster.ma.us/affordable-housing-trust>

- 7) **Describe past efforts in the Municipality** – As explained above, the Housing Trust was established in 2020 and began working in January 2021. Prior to this, there were grassroots resident efforts that culminated in the current Housing Trust.

Some successful affordable housing production effort did indeed occur prior to this, albeit without the benefit of an organized and concerted effort by a town board such as a Housing Trust. It was done largely through a former Town Planner with assistance from prior Select Boards and land use boards. Lancaster's Town Planner position is currently vacant, and our Town Administrator recently accepted a new position elsewhere. Both of these departures are a loss to the Town. We look forward to regaining assistance from both positions when staffed, and their helpful support for Lancaster's affordable housing production efforts.

- 8) **Describe any identified barriers and challenges** – Many of our initiatives require a town meeting vote as well as permitting approval from Lancaster's land use boards and/or other permitting approval authorities. This is why pro-active communication on the affordable housing needs and goals for Lancaster is so important to us. The Housing Trust would like to be providing accurate information, education, and outreach early and often in advance of public decision making.

- 9) **List all technical assistance services around housing received by the municipality in the past TWO years** - The Affordable Housing Trust has not applied for technical assistance before from CHAPA or any other agency. The Town has received DLTA funds through the Town Administrator's successful efforts, and some of these were used to hire the Montachusett Regional Planning Commission to assist with the 40R District mentioned above.