

CHARLIE BAKER
Governor



KARYN POLITO
Lt. Governor

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CONTACT

Brendan Moss

brendan.c.moss@massmail.state.ma.us



Baker-Polito Administration Highlights Housing Choice Bill in Lawrence

Legislation designed to support communities in their goals to increase new housing production receives endorsement from Mayor Rivera and local stakeholders

LAWRENCE – Today, Governor Charlie Baker joined Lawrence Mayor Dan Rivera and other local leaders to highlight An Act to Promote Housing Choices, [legislation filed by Governor Baker in February](#) that calls for targeted zoning reform to advance new housing production in Massachusetts and support the administration’s goal to produce 135,000 new housing units by 2025.

Today’s event highlighted development activity in Lawrence, a Gateway City that has leveraged a wide array of state programs, including a Housing Choice Capital Grant to support [Phase II of the O’Connell Park Renovation](#) project that ensures safe, green space that benefits residents in this densely populated neighborhood.

Lawrence earned the Housing Choice designation in 2018, having achieved production targets and set policies that encourage future sustainable growth, making them eligible for the capital grant program. The administration’s Housing Choice legislation will help other communities to replicate the successes realized in Lawrence by enabling them to adopt several zoning best practices.

“Housing is a major priority for our Administration, and we have invested more than \$1 billion into the affordable housing ecosystem while advancing thousands of market-rate units through tools such as the Housing Development Incentive Program,” **said Governor Charlie Baker**. “We believe that *An Act to Promote Housing Choices* is Massachusetts’ best opportunity to increase production in the face of an acute housing shortage, and will continue to work together with our partners in the Legislature to ensure this bill passes.”

Local organizations including Lawrence Community Works, Lawrence Partnership and Reed Community Partners joined Mayor Rivera in endorsing the legislation at an event held at PAC 10 Lofts.

“Our Administration is proud to support the needs of all 351 of Massachusetts’ cities and towns and appreciates Mayor Rivera’s leadership on this critical issue,” **said Lt. Governor Karyn Polito**. “Governor Baker and I will continue to work with our local partners to ensure that families and businesses alike have the housing required to support their growth and wellbeing.”

The legislative proposal will enable cities and towns to adopt certain zoning best practices related to housing production by a simple majority vote, rather than the current two-thirds supermajority. This legislation will not mandate cities and towns to make any of these zoning changes; but will allow municipalities that want to rezone for denser, transit or downtown oriented, and new housing development to do so more easily. Massachusetts is currently one of only a few states to require a supermajority to change local zoning.

Zoning changes that promote best practices for housing growth that would qualify for the simple majority threshold include:

- Building mixed-use, multi-family, and starter homes, and adopting 40R “Smart Growth” zoning in town centers and near transit.
- Allowing the development of accessory dwelling units, or “in-law” apartments.
- Approving Smart Growth or Starter Homes districts that put housing near existing activity centers.
- Granting increased density through a special permit process.
- Allowing for the transfer of development rights and enacting natural resource protection zoning.
- Reducing parking requirements and dimensional requirements, such as minimum lot sizes.

This legislation also includes a provision, added by the Joint Committee on Housing last session, that would reduce the voting threshold for a special permit issued by a local permit granting authority to a simple majority vote, for certain multi-family or mixed-use projects with at least 10% affordable units in locations near transit or, in centers of commercial activity within a municipality.

“Like many Gateway Cities, Lawrence offers vast untapped potential to companies considering relocation. But acting on these opportunities is often constrained by a lack of workforce housing,” **said Secretary of Housing and Economic Development Mike Kennealy**. “Housing Choice legislation would make it much easier for municipalities to meet their housing needs, empowering communities like Lawrence to attract and secure the innovative companies driving growth around the Commonwealth.”

The legislation is part of the administration’s Housing Choice Initiative, which provides incentives, technical assistance, and capital grant funding to encourage new housing production that meets the long-term needs of the Commonwealth’s growing, and aging, population.

“Our families, seniors, workforce, individuals with disabilities, and vulnerable populations have diverse housing needs, and today’s market is not meeting them. Housing that our residents can afford is a crucial resource and An Act to Promote Housing Choices will create the tools we need to promote new housing development for those across incomes,” **said Acting Undersecretary of Housing and Community Development Jennifer Maddox**. “We are proud of the coalition we’ve built in support of this legislation and the investments we’ve made in affordable housing, community development, and

public housing to benefit the many communities which contribute to our strong, inclusive Commonwealth.”

“Housing stock has always been and will continue to be a priority in the City of Lawrence,” **said Lawrence Mayor Daniel Rivera**. “By 2020, we will have 1,500 new units of mixed affordable housing and market rate housing online. I want to thank our community partners and developers who invest in the city and support our housing plan. I also want to thank Governor Baker and Lieutenant Governor Polito for making housing a priority- their commitment to this plays a major role in our success here in Lawrence.”

“Housing production and affordability are clearly among the most important issues facing our city, state, and nation,” **said Jess Andors, Executive Director of Lawrence Community Works**. “The Governor's Housing Choice legislation is a critical step towards promoting smart and equitable development that meets the diverse needs of residents and businesses, and supports local revitalization and vibrancy.”

“Every day more and more people are moving to the Merrimack valley, and the creation of more housing will be very helpful for the betterment of quality of live needed to house families in cities like Lawrence,” **said local developer Alberto Nunez**. “It’s not a secret that Massachusetts is one of the best places to live. Right now there are 2 sometimes 3 families living in a single unit and today we know there is a large demand of housing in this area and this is why this is a good project for the city of Lawrence.”

The bulk of the work of Reed Community Partners is centered on developing large, affordable and market-rate housing to help revitalize the cores of urban and suburban cities. We are strong believers in developing near existing public transit, increasing density, reducing sprawl that inevitably demands new taxpayer subsidies, and making housing more affordable for both renters and homeowners,” **said Josh Blevin, Director of Reed Community Partners**. “The legislation supported by the Governor and the Mayor is a smart way to make it easier for cities and towns to help that happen.”

“Housing continues to be an area of opportunity and priority for growing populations and growing economies like those in Lawrence, which is why the creative solution-making built on collaboration and alignment between private developers, non-profit developers and state and local officials is to be celebrated and supported,” **said Derek Mitchell, Executive Director of Lawrence Partnership**. “The effective public/private strategies that have helped us innovate in the past will continue to be our greatest assets moving forward.”

“The demand for a diverse housing mix continues to grow each year, but with Governor Baker’s forward-acting initiatives, his long-term vision for the city of Lawrence and this current legislation, integrated communities are now possible in this Gateway City,” **said Sal Lupoli of Lupoli Companies**. “When you create new homes, you bring new people and a new vibrancy to a city, and that translates to job growth and additional revenue sources which leads to better neighborhoods and more self-pride for all residents.”

“Making housing more affordable for residents of this state needs to be one of our top priorities,” **said Sen. Barry Finegold (2nd Essex and Middlesex)**. “PAC 10 Lofts are a great example of the kind of

affordable, mixed income buildings being created in my district, and they are a model we should be replicating across the state."

"I've been encouraged by the Baker-Polito Administrations prioritization of housing across the Commonwealth, and I'm thrilled to support a conversation around building mixed-use, multi-family homes in the Merrimack Valley," **said Rep. Frank Moran of Lawrence**. "Residents in our community are finding it more and more difficult to own or even rent a home with the current shortage, and bold action and a comprehensive approach to address this issue is needed. I'd like to thank Governor Baker and Lt. Governor Polito for their leadership on this issue."

The Baker-Polito Administration has shown a deep commitment to increasing the production of housing across income levels. Since 2015, the administration has invested more than \$1 billion in affordable housing, resulting in the production and preservation of more than 17,000 housing units, including 15,000 affordable units. [In 2018, Governor Baker signed the largest housing bond bill](#) in Massachusetts history, committing more than \$1.8 billion to the future of affordable housing production and preservation. The Baker-Polito Administration has also advanced the development of more than 7,000 mixed-income housing units through the successful [MassWorks Infrastructure Program](#), reformed the [Housing Development Incentive Program](#), and worked with communities to implement smart-growth development and planning efforts.

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