

PRESS RELEASE

Baker-Polito Administration Highlights Housing Choice Bill in Williamstown

Local leaders endorse legislation that aims to support communities statewide in their goals to increase new housing production

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Executive Office of Housing and Economic Development

The Office of Governor Charlie Baker and Lt. Governor Karyn Polito

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WILLIAMSTOWN — Today, Lt. Governor Karyn Polito and Secretary of Housing and Economic Development Mike Kennealy joined Williamstown Town Manager Jason Hoch and other local leaders to highlight *An Act to Promote Housing Choices*, [legislation filed by Governor Baker in Februar](#)

https://urldefense.proofpoint.com/v2/url?u=https-3A__mass.us20.list-2Dmanage.com_track_click-3Fu-3Dd76848d6925ee08d7a5fe3097-26id-3D3dba753e00-26e-3D83a1 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 successful collaboration between Williamstown and the state, including a recent \$250,000 Housing Choice grant to support critical communications equipment at the new police station and support for the Cable Mills community housing development, which leveraged \$1 million in Community Preservation Act funding.

The Williamstown Board of Selectmen, Williamstown Planning Board, Williamstown Council on Aging, and Berkshire Housing Development Corporation joined Town Manager Hoch in endorsing the legislation.

“I was proud to sign the largest housing bill in Massachusetts history while advancing thousands of market-rate units through tools like the Housing Development Incentive Program, but we recognize more must be done to combat the housing crisis in the Commonwealth,” **said Governor Charlie Baker.** “We believe in our Housing Choice legislation’s potential to empower desperately needed housing production in our communities, and will continue to work with our partners in the Legislature to pass this bill.”

“I am so glad to be here in Williamstown to highlight our Housing Choice proposal, which has great promise for both Western Massachusetts and the entire Commonwealth,” **said Lt. Governor Karyn Polito.** “Housing is one of the most fundamental elements of

economic security, in communities of all sizes. Our Administration will continue to advocate for *An Act to Promote Housing Choices*, so that the families and businesses of Massachusetts can continue to thrive and grow.”

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 4OR “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.

“Providing viable housing is critical to the success of any community, and stimulating production in the Berkshires would allow municipalities like Williamstown to retain and attract the talent necessary to unlock new growth. But current zoning reform requirements make this nearly impossible for developers,” **said Housing and Economic Development Secretary Mike Kennealy**. “Our Housing Choice legislation is the Commonwealth’s best shot to address the current shortage before it constrains the growth of our economy.”

The legislation is part of the administration’s [Housing Choice Initiative](#)

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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.”

“Access to housing across a variety of styles and price points is critical to maintaining the health of our community. It is important to the Town of Williamstown to support efforts that support expansion of housing opportunities,” **said Town Manager Jason Hoch**. “I am particularly grateful, as well, that the Housing Choice program recognizes that with these opportunities comes new expectations for municipal services and appreciate the key support of a capital grant from the program that is allowing upgrade of emergency communications equipment in our new Police Station.”

“The Housing Choice Initiative legislation would benefit Williamstown by making it easier for us to increase the stock of affordable housing, an urgent need here,” **said Jeffrey Thomas, Vice Chair of the Williamstown Board of Selectmen**. “A simple majority vote to make housing-related zoning changes here would let us adapt to ever-changing housing needs and help ensure our Town’s long-term vibrancy.”

“For the past 3 years the Planning Board has worked diligently to offer solutions for our communities housing needs. We have

successfully reduced parking requirements for mixed use as well as added better mixed use regulations to our business zones. Where we struggle most is adapting best practices to our 30-year-old residential zoning bylaws,” **said Amy Jeschawitz, Chair of the Williamstown Planning Board.** “It is hard to convince current residents who have homes and are financially stable to create higher density, add accessory dwelling units by right or reduce dimensional requirements where it works for infill. The threshold of a simple majority would help us get there. I am proud to endorse the Governor’s legislation for the Housing Choice Initiative and the best practices it includes.”

“I am proud to live in a community whose residents understand that housing is essential to community health, and have actively taken strides toward the creation of expanding housing options,” **said Brian O’Grady, Director of the Williamstown Council on Aging.** “Working with seniors at the Council on Aging, we receive housing inquiries monthly and are acutely aware of the need for additional housing, especially affordable housing, for elders looking to move here or downsize to something smaller. Whether it be through new construction, accessory dwellings or division of large existing homes to multi-family use, this will make it possible for more people to stay here or move here and contribute to community life in Williamstown.”

“On behalf of Berkshire Housing Development Corporation I applaud and support Governor Baker’s Housing Choice Initiative, which lowers the super majority threshold required for zoning changes and which, therefore, will grant local zoning boards and committees expanded opportunities to create affordable housing in their communities,” **said Elton Ogden, President of Berkshire Housing Development Corporation.** “It also provides for town residents to work with the real estate development community to provide attractive and safe housing for those with a broad range of incomes including low income households. This is housing desperately needed in Berkshire County to maintain a year-round workforce for the many businesses who rely heavily on service-related and hospitality workers.”

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](https://urldefense.proofpoint.com/v2/url?u=https-3A__mass.us20.list-2Dmanage.com_track_click-3Fu-3Dd76848d6925ee08d7a5fe3097-26id-3D629ac1f7c2-26e-3D83a1c1)

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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](https://urldefense.proofpoint.com/v2/url?u=https-3A__mass.us20.list-2Dmanage.com_track_click-3Fu-3Dd76848d6925ee08d7a5fe3097-26id-3D275ac0dd6f-26e-3D83a1c1)

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reformed the [Housing Development Incentive Program](https://urldefense.proofpoint.com/v2/url?u=https-3A__mass.us20.list-2Dmanage.com_track_click-3Fu-3Dd76848d6925ee08d7a5fe3097-26id-3D232c9708d2-26e-3D83a1c1)

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and worked with communities to implement smart-growth development and planning efforts.

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