

Housing Forum Summary

Midcoast Council of Governments

July 19, 2022

Introduction. Midcoast Council of Governments (MCOG) held a two-part housing forum on July 19, 2022, that included shareholders and community representative sessions. Over 80 people attended one or more of the sessions. All materials are available on MCOG Website: <https://www.midcoastcog.com/>.

Summary of Presentations:

- Mathew Eddy, Executive Director of MCOG:
 - Reviewed housing data and goals from around the region in the context of a Housing Continuum (homeless, low-income renters, market rate renters, first time homebuyers, next homebuyers, seniors, and special needs housing).
 - MCOG will be developing a more substantial data assessment developed around subregions and labor markets.
 - Housing Issues will receive additional attention in MCOG Strategic Planning process in the fall of 2022; watch for notices.
- Dan Brennan, Executive Director of Maine Housing
 - Defined housing need generally as spending no more than 30% of household income on housing
 - Reviewed Maine Housing “Continuum” of housing programs for homeless, supportive housing, rental housing (new units created mostly through the low-income tax credit), first time homebuyers, housing voucher programs, and the community partnership programs (working directly with municipalities).
 - A new homeownership program gives developers grants for housing that meets certain affordability guidelines. The funds are already all used on developments in the pipeline.
 - The “Unbridged” islands have a program for 2-4 dwelling units.
- Greg Payne, GOPIF and Jeff Levine, Levine Consulting LLC
 - Reviewed the Governor’s Office of Innovation and the Future (GOPIF) and the recent legislation of LD2003:
 - Statewide housing production goals
 - Accessory dwelling units as a matter of right in all communities
 - Ability to construct 2-4 units and additional affordable units at higher densities as a matter of right in municipal Growth Areas
 - The need and right to control short term rentals
 - Housing Partnership programs to assist municipalities and regional councils in addressing housing issues.

Summary of Community Issues and Ideas:

- The state is short 25,000 affordable housing units right now, placing pressure on the entire housing continuum.

- Affordable Housing is receiving more financial support in recent years, because of the pandemic, and the need for new workers.
- Employers cannot find workers, as the cost of local housing exceeds the affordability of the average household income. Vacancy rates noted in the 2020 Census show an issue with the lack of affordable year-round rental housing.
- Increased costs in heating testing the limits of state LIHEAP subsidy and are requiring assistance that provides greater winterization.
- Homelessness in the region is at unprecedented levels, as those in the lower parts of the continuum cannot find housing.
- To support housing, there is a need for infrastructure upgrades, a more intense use of underutilized land and vacant properties.
- There is a need across the region to begin the land banking process to ensure available land in the future for affordable housing; a new state program may be available in 2024.
- Local non-profits are also having trouble finding employees to assist young families who are most in need.
- Childcare and transportation expenses are added issues related to housing and workforce needs and are exacerbated on long peninsulas and islands.
- Employers and developers must play an increased role in housing development.
- Moratoriums, like that in Brunswick, may increase as communities are concerned with developers not preserving a base level of affordable housing.
- All housing markets are impacted as the movement across housing continuums is stuck, e.g. moderate income renters cannot find homes that are affordable, given their incomes. There are few choices for housing for moderate to median income households in the current housing market.
- Movement from away, remote working, and investment properties have pushed up the value of housing in our coastal and inland communities. A key article worth reading is The Great Housing Shortage: the Facts (<http://thetownsman.org/portlands-great-housing-shortage-the-facts/>)
- Towns can work to better provide affordable housing locally through local incentives, such as zoning or affordable housing TIF programs.
- Subsidy vouchers no longer cover the cost of an affordable housing unit if the household can even locate that unit.