

BayCoast Mortgage Exciting New Program Is Giving Homeowners A Lift Up In Greater New Bedford

Buying a home can bring a sense of joy, satisfaction, and accomplishment. But with rising prices in the local housing market combined with today's uncertain economy, not everyone will have the opportunity to experience the excitement that comes with homeownership. This can be especially true when considering wealth differences in our South Coast community.

That's why BayCoast Mortgage (www.baycoastmortgage.com), a leading lender in Southern New England, is proud to announce it is participating in an exciting new program that aims to increase homeownership opportunities throughout our community, with the goal of promoting a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive home-buying environment.

That new program is called Lift Up Homeownership.

Initiated by FHLBank Boston, the Lift Up program provides funding to member financial institutions, including BayCoast Mortgage, to award down payment and closing cost assistance grants of up to \$50,000 to people of color including Black/African American, American Indian, Alaska Native, Asian (Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander), Hispanic, or Latino borrowers earning up to 120% of the area median income (AMI) and are first-time homebuyers.

Lift Up was put in place to address barriers that many people of color face when purchasing a home, including limited savings for a down payment and the racial financial gap that exists in many area cities and towns.

“As part of the BayCoast family, it is our mission to provide exceptional service and financial solutions for our community,” said Nicholas L. Christ, President and CEO of BayCoast Mortgage. “Our partnership with FHLBank Boston will help expand affordable housing opportunities in the South Coast communities we serve by offering critical down payment and closing cost assistance. We’re proud to assist our neighbors as they pursue homeownership and the American Dream.”

A total of \$500,000 is available through Lift Up Homeownership, which is a purchase-only program for one-to-four unit properties located in New England. Grants will be available on a first-come, first-served basis.

For further details about the program and to learn if you may qualify, please call BayCoast Mortgage at 877-466-2678 or visit our website at baycoastmortgage.com.

About BayCoast Mortgage

BayCoast Mortgage Company, LLC is a wholly owned subsidiary of BayCoast Bank, serving MA, RI, CT, NH, PA, NJ, MD, VA, SC, NC, and FL, offering a wide variety of home mortgage products, including FHA, VA, Land, Construction, Conforming and Jumbo Loans. Visit www.baycoastmortgage.com or call 877-466-2678.

Accountants sound the alarm over high-income residents

Leaving Massachusetts

Michael P. Norton

State House News Service

Accountants continue to sound the alarm over high-income residents leaving Massachusetts, in part to avoid the new income surtax that even the CPAs acknowledge has led to a “surge” in state tax revenues.

In its new 2024 public policy and competitiveness report, the Massachusetts Society of Certified Public Accountants said two-thirds of accounting professionals surveyed reported that at least one high-income client relocated out of Massachusetts in the last year.

Ninety percent of accounting professionals indicated high-income clients are considering leaving Massachusetts, the report said, and 64 percent of respondents indicated the 4 percent surtax on household income above \$1 million per year is a factor in relocation decisions.

The survey involved 128 CPAs who collectively represent 3,600 clients with annual taxable income of more than \$1 million.

“The top three states to which Massachusetts residents are moving or considering moving are New Hampshire, Florida and Texas,” the report said. “Fifty-three percent of accounting professionals say that their clients are considering moving across the border to New Hampshire, suggesting that the tax burden imposed by Massachusetts plays an important part in the decision to relocate – and refuting the claims that individuals are just relocating due to a desire for sunnier weather and more coastline.”

Massachusetts collected \$1.84 billion from the voter-approved surtax on the state’s highest earners through the first nine months of fiscal 2024, the Department of Revenue reported in

May. Collections from the surtax appear on track to easily surpass \$2 billion per year, and Beacon Hill Democrats continue to advance big plans to invest the new revenue in public education and transportation.

Last month, the Raise Up Coalition, which successfully pushed for the tax change as a constitutional amendment, used news of the \$1.84 billion in collections to point to investments that it said are “making a real difference in the lives of people across Massachusetts.” Examples ranged from increased public college scholarships and free school meals to upgrades at the MBTA and road repair funding for cities and towns.

While collections are roughly aligning with revenue projections that date back to 2015, the Raise Up Coalition used last month’s news to assert that those who claimed that multi-millionaires would flee Massachusetts rather than pay the new tax “are being proven wrong every day.”

Evan Horowitz, executive director of the Center for State Policy Analysis at Tufts University, said some people are leaving Massachusetts due to the new tax, but said the revenue collections show that it’s not a “tidal wave.”

The tax is too new to gauge its impact on households that earn just more than \$1 million per year versus households with incomes well above that threshold. Horowitz said tax avoidance among high-income households is a “much bigger challenge” than the threat of households leaving Massachusetts for lower-tax states.

The surtax switched Massachusetts away from a flat income tax rate of 5 percent. Income over \$1 million is now taxed at an effective 9 percent, putting the rate in line with “more burdensome states” such as New York, New Jersey and Vermont, according to the report, which notes the surtax was indexed for inflation so the threshold for the 2024 tax year will be \$1,053,750.

In its report, the accountants group acknowledges “a short-term surge in revenues from the surtax,” while contending that “the long-term uncertainty is concerning given the share of total state revenues derived from this group of residents.”

While major tax policy changes do not appear to be a focus of top Democrats over the last six weeks of formal sessions, the CPA group is calling on the Legislature to pass three measures it says would make Massachusetts more competitive.

First, the society says Massachusetts should join 21 other states by decoupling from the federal limit on business interest expense to support companies that have already invested in Massachusetts and to “ensure that businesses based in Massachusetts deduct more interest from borrowing, which results in more infrastructure investments in our backyard.”

A 2023 tax reform law increased the estate tax exemption to \$2 million and the CPA group recommends raising it further to \$5 million, and adjusting it for inflation. Neighboring states offer more generous exemptions, including New York (\$6.1 million), Vermont (\$5 million) and Connecticut, which is aligned with the federal threshold at \$12.92 million. New Jersey repealed its estate tax in 2018.

“Despite progress, we believe there remains room for improvement,” the report said. “With the tax reform package signed into law, Massachusetts has transitioned from possessing the lowest estate tax exemption to now ranking as the third lowest in the nation.”

CPAs also continue to call on Beacon Hill to eliminate or reform the “sting tax,” an entity-level tax imposed on larger S-corporations. The group says the tax was enacted in the 1980s to safeguard tax benefits for small businesses and level the playing field between large S-corporations and C-corporations, but now “negatively sets Massachusetts apart from other states in terms of its taxation.”

“The thresholds for net income triggering the additional excise tax (\$6 million and \$9 million) have been neither updated nor adjusted since its original enactment,” the group said. “Consequently, an increasing number of small businesses have been adversely affected.”

With the new income surtax, many small businesses and S-corporations find themselves in a position where shareholders are subject to a tax burden exceeding the 8 percent corporate tax rate, “which is in direct conflict with the original intent of the law,” the report said.

Massachusetts House Outlines \$6.2 Billion Housing Plan

Sam Drysdale

State House News Service

House Democrats will seek a vote this week on a bill that combines \$6.2 billion in state borrowing and tax credits with policy reforms designed to unlock new housing production, including development of units on single-family lots.

With sky-high sale prices and rents suffocating residents, the House will try to shift the tide by pumping more money into existing housing programs and rolling out a few new strategies, but not the local-option transfer tax Gov. Maura Healey proposed.

The House Ways and Means Committee bulked up the five-year, \$4.1 billion bill Healey filed in October (H 4138), calling for \$2 billion to fix the state’s aging public housing stock and \$1 billion to expand the Massachusetts Water Resources

Authority's service area into more suburbs with the goal of spurring housing production.

Top Democrats sought to portray the proposal as a landmark – Housing Committee Co-chair Rep. James Arciero called it “the largest housing investment in state history” – and as merely one step toward untangling a thicket that for years has generated dire warnings.

Some estimates have suggested Massachusetts needs to generate 200,000 more units of housing to keep up with population growth and prevent workers from departing for other states.

“You don't have the capacity to build all those units all at once anyway, so it's ridiculous to think that you're going to solve this with one bond issue. I think it's the beginning of a process,” Mariano said Monday.

“We hear all the time about people not staying, college grads looking for more affordable housing, and I think that's something we have to be aware of and we have to begin the process right away,” he added. “We can't wait.”

The House plans to take up the redrafted bill (H 4707) on Wednesday.

Housing challenges were at the forefront of public concern at the outset of the 2023-2024 session, but lawmakers are only now about to embark on deliberations about concrete policy reforms, more than seven months after Healey filed her own proposal.

Healey has suggested her bill could lead to more than 40,000 new housing units, and House Democrats said Monday they're unable to put an estimate on the number of new units Massachusetts could expect from the major funding commitment.

Much of the bond authorization in the bill would recapitalize existing programs, typically at higher levels.

Close to half of the House bill's bottom line covers just two provisions. It would direct \$1 billion toward the MWRA expansion efforts, and make \$2 billion – \$500 million more than Healey proposed – available for repairs, rehabilitation and modernization to the roughly 43,000 public housing units in Massachusetts.

Many of those homes are in a state of disrepair, and WBUR and ProPublica reported last year that about 2,300 units were vacant.

"We were unaware of the number until we got hit in the head with it, and it's a real need," Mariano said Monday. "Cities and towns have put off putting people in units because they can't get them up into a livable standard."

One-quarter of the public housing funding in the House bill would be reserved for preserving housing for residents who earn less than 30 percent of the area median income.

Another \$800 million in the bill would flow to the Affordable Housing Trust Fund, which works to create or preserve homes for families who earn about the median area income or less.

One idea House Democrats added to the mix would make \$150 million available to help cities and towns convert commercial properties into multifamily residences or mixed-use options. Project sponsors could also qualify for tax credits worth up to 10 percent of development costs.

House Ways and Means Committee Chair Aaron Michlewitz said that proposal would "tackl[e] two different issues at the same time" by helping to create a path forward for vacant commercial properties, which have become more common since the COVID-19 pandemic rewired work patterns.

The bill also embraces Healey's proposal to allow for accessory dwelling units, or ADUs, by right in single-family zones across the state. Supporters say those homes offer a

viable option for larger families who want to keep adult children or aging parents close by, and the Healey administration previously estimated the reforms could lead to production of up to 10,000 ADUs in five years.

House Democrats did not, however, go along with one of the most controversial ideas in Healey's bill: allowing cities and towns to impose new taxes on pricey real estate transactions and steer the revenue toward housing.

Several communities, including Boston and those on Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket, for years have sought state permission to roll out transfer fees, arguing that the policy change could drum up much-needed money for affordable housing. Boston Mayor Michelle Wu told lawmakers last year that if a 2 percent tax on the portion of any real estate sale over \$2 million were in place in Boston, it would have generated up to \$100 million from only 700 transactions out of more than 10,000 that took place.

Healey gave Wu and other supporters a jolt of optimism by backing a statewide local option in her housing bond bill. The measure drew opposition from real estate industry groups such as the Greater Boston Real Estate Board, who argued that it would increase prices.

Mariano hinted earlier this spring that he was at least open to the idea, telling business leaders that "we must explore all options that have the potential to make a real difference." But he said Monday that he found the measure "was not as universally appealing as I thought it might be" among representatives.

"It's so inequitable. You'd raise a ton of money in Nantucket and you'd raise next to nothing in Lawrence," Mariano said. "It's hard to have an effective housing policy that is going to spur development when there's that much of a difference."

A reporter asked what the harm would be in approving the

measure as a local option, which would greenlight it only in communities that actively want to impose the higher fees.

“The harm is that you get a scattered policy that doesn’t help anyone. It only helps the folks with the money,” Mariano replied.

“Piecemealing it one by one by city and town is just not effective real housing policy, and it doesn’t solve the housing crisis that we’re in across the commonwealth,” Michlewitz added.

The Healey administration estimated that, if half of municipalities adopted the local option with a 1 percent tax and put revenue toward subsidizing housing at about \$350,000 per unit, it could add 3,210 affordable homes over five years.

Asked Monday if she felt the bill would be watered down without the transfer tax, Healey replied that she had not yet seen the House bill but was glad that it had been released.

Representatives rejected an earlier version of the idea in 2020. At the time, Cambridge Rep. Mike Connolly sought to add a local option real estate transfer fee to an economic development bill, but the House shot down the idea 29-130.

Virtually all of the major changes to Healey’s bill – one of the most impactful proposals of the two-year term – occurred in the final stage of review, the step controlled by Mariano’s top deputies.

The Housing Committee spent more than four months reviewing Healey’s proposal before advancing it without altering a single word, and the Bonding Committee also left the original bill intact. The House Ways and Means Committee, which unlike the other two comprises only representatives and no senators, then substantially raised the bill’s bottom line and spiked the transfer tax language.

Bond bills authorize capital spending but annual state borrowing amounts across a wide range of priority areas are limited by how much debt service the state can afford in its annual budget.

Michlewitz said he wants to take advantage of the April 2023 rating upgrade Standard & Poor's Global Ratings awarded to Massachusetts.

"We're trying to take advantage of our most recent bond rating increase. Now's the time to go higher on that, to take advantage of it, as high as we can," he said.

[Alison Kuznitz and Sam Drysdale contributed reporting.]

Median Massachusetts Home Prices Rose 9.9% To \$610,000

Colin A. Young

State House News Service

There were 3,100 single-family homes sold in Massachusetts last month, and while that number alone may not mean much to those still looking for an affordable home here it may represent a glimmer of hope – it was the largest year-over-year increase in sales since June 2021.

Real estate market analysts at The Warren Group said April's sales volume represented a 6.8 percent climb over the 2,902 sales recorded in April 2023 and just the third time in nearly three years that home sales were up from the same month a year prior (following tiny increases in January and February of this year). Cassidy Norton, The Warren Group's associate

publisher, called April's sales "a positive sign for both buyers and sellers" but highlighted how sales volume alone can't tell the whole story.

The median single-family home sale price rose 9.9 percent compared to April 2023 to hit \$610,000 last month, a new all-time high for the month and the first time the median home price has crossed the \$600,000 ceiling this year.

"The market has been exceedingly tight in recent years as mortgage rates and building costs rose. More sales didn't move the needle on home prices, however; the median single-family home sale price in April rose nearly 10 percent," she said, adding that last month's median price was not far off the record high of \$615,000 set in June 2023.

The sales and price increases were roughly the same when looking just at the 139 communities inside the Interstate 495 belt, The Warren Group said. Greater Boston sales were up 8.8 percent to 1,517 in April as the median price shot up 10.1 percent to \$760,000.

Through the first four months of 2024, 10,113 single-family homes have sold in Massachusetts – eight more homes than were sold in the same span of 2023, or a 0.1 percent increase. But compared to the first four months of 2023, the year-to-date median single-family home price here is now 9.5 percent higher, at \$575,000, The Warren Group said.

Home sales across Massachusetts sank to a 12-year low in 2023 and housing here is inaccessible or unaffordable for many residents. Gov. Maura Healey last year identified housing as "the number-one issue facing this state" and said there is a shortage of 200,000 units across the state.

The five-year, \$4.12 billion housing bond bill (H 4138) she filed in the fall seeking to kickstart production of new housing units has not surfaced in the House, where it stands as one of numerous significant pieces of legislation

that lawmakers say they intend to pass into law by the time their formal work concludes for the year on July 31.

On Monday, Lt. Gov. Kim Driscoll and Housing and Livable Communities Secretary Ed Augustus participated in a roundtable discussion with residents who recently purchased a home through a state-sponsored first-time homebuyer program.

Sponsored by the Massachusetts Housing Partnership, MassHousing and the Mass. Affordable Housing Alliance, the event also promoted Healey's bill. The administration said the bill would authorize \$50 million for "MassDreams" to create first-time homebuyer opportunities, authorize \$100 million for the Commonwealth Builder Program to spur construction of affordable single-family homes in Gateway Cities and similar markets, and create a Homeownership Tax Credit for first-time homebuyers.

"Affordable homeownership allows people to sink roots into a community and begin to accumulate equity and wealth from owning their own home that might eventually be passed on to future generations," MassHousing CEO Chrystal Kornegay said. "Creating more opportunity for homeownership is a major part of addressing the housing and wealth disparities in Massachusetts."

Another snapshot of the housing market and the struggles that homeowners and renters face is expected on June 20, when the Joint Center for Housing Studies of Harvard University plans to release the "State of the Nation's Housing 2024 Report."

"On the for-sale side, millions of potential homebuyers have been priced out of the market by high home prices and interest rates, while the number of renters with cost burdens has hit an all-time high," the center said in an advisory Tuesday. "However, a surge in new multifamily rental units is slowing rent growth and accelerated single-family construction is starting to life for-sale inventories."

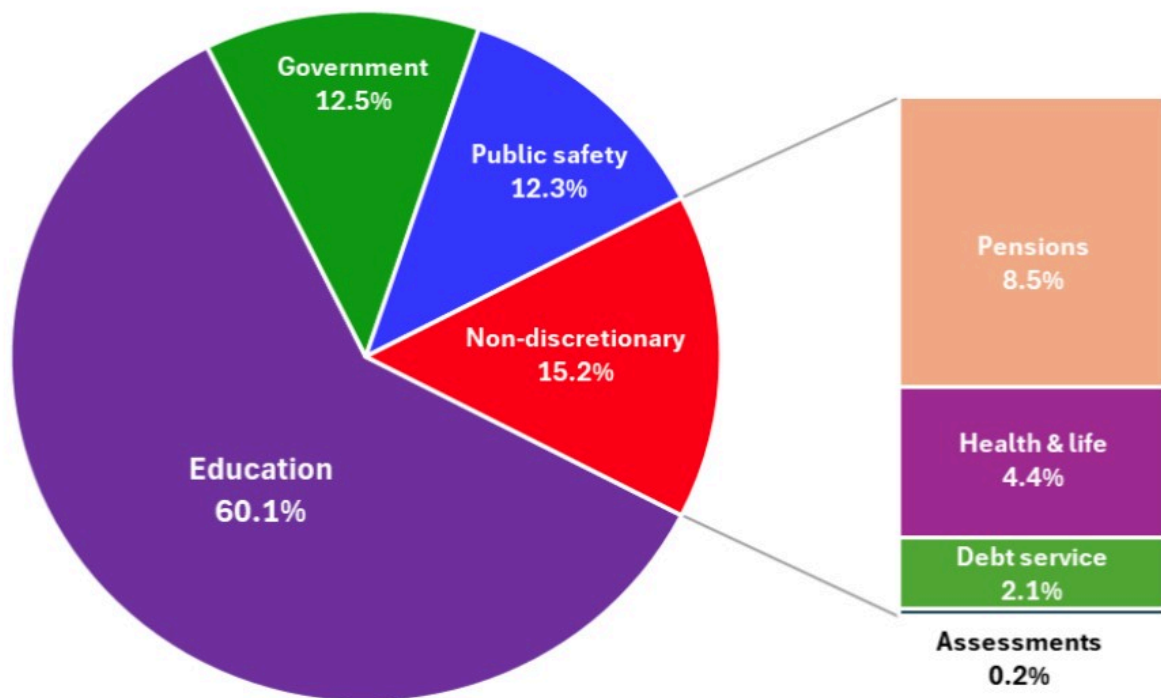
Mayor Jon Mitchell's FY2025 delivers budget proposal to New Bedford City Council

"Mayor Jon Mitchell delivered his FY2025 budget proposal to the City Council Wednesday night.

Did you know that about 75% of the total budget (the purple and red pie slices in the chart) are costs the City is legally mandated to pay, no matter what? That's why we encourage everyone to check out the Mayor's address and the complete budget proposal, both available on our website, to learn about the budget process and the proposed plan.

We know municipal finance isn't the most exciting thing on your plate, especially right in the middle of a Celtics playoff game, but it's extremely important, especially to New Bedford taxpayers."-City of New Bedford.

FY 2025 General Fund Appropriations by Category



City of New Bedford photo.

Complete Budget Proposal: newbedford-ma.s3.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/55/20240515193836/Proposed_Final4.pdf

Mayor's Budget Address: newbedford-ma.s3.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/20240515194329/FY25BudgetAddress.pdf

Massachusetts Adding Family Shelters at former Norfolk correctional facility

By Alison Kuznitz

State House News Service

State officials are planning to open an overflow shelter at a former Norfolk correctional facility next month that can

accommodate about 140 families, a move from the Healey administration that drew frustration from a Republican lawmaker.

The Bay State Correctional Center, a former minimum-security prison that closed in 2015, is slated to house around 450 individuals starting in mid-June, Rep. Marcus Vaughn of Wrentham said in a letter posted on social media Friday evening.

"I regret to inform you that Norfolk has been chosen as the next site for an overflow shelter, a decision I received with deep disappointment this Friday afternoon," Vaughn wrote to Norfolk residents. "However, I firmly believe in transparency, hence I feel it's crucial to share this news with you."

Vaughn said administration officials are opening the site due to "mounting concerns" over migrant families staying at Logan Airport, though he warned situating a shelter in Norfolk could affect local schools and public safety.

"Undoubtedly, this development will strain our school systems in Norfolk and at King Philip Middle and High school and will likely impact public safety infrastructure, concerns I emphasized during our discussion with the Governor's office," Vaughn wrote. "While assurances were given regarding on-site security, I intend to meet with [Police] Chief [Timothy] Heinz to explore avenues to mitigate the burden on our town's public safety departments. Acknowledging the financial strain on our schools, I conveyed our concerns about reimbursement to the Governor's office, who assured us of ongoing dialogue with the Department of Elementary and Secondary Educational (DESE) to address these challenges."

Sen. Becca Rausch, a Needham Democrat, struck a different tone about the Norfolk shelter in a statement she issued Monday afternoon.

"I hope no one would want to see pregnant women, children, and

families without shelter,” Rausch said. “At the same time, the impacts of an influx of more than 400 people, including many school-aged children, to a town with a population of only 11,500 must be managed carefully and responsibly. I have expressed to the Administration my concerns regarding significant student needs, increased demands on town water and other infrastructure, additional municipal financial burdens, and the general suitability of Bay State Correctional as an emergency overflow shelter.”

Rausch said she’s also reached out to local government partners.

“I remain committed to my service to the Town of Norfolk and helping navigate this situation, made even more difficult due to the absence of financial or other assistance from the federal government,” she said.

Scott Rice, the state’s emergency assistance director, said the former prison is in “good condition.” The facility has dorm rooms, with bathrooms and showers on every floor, Rice said.

“Additionally, the facility has a cafeteria, a gymnasium, a large common room, and offices that will be utilized for case management and administrative activities,” Rice said in a statement. “The site will be set up with play areas for children, as well as classroom spaces for adults to engage in activities that support pathways to stability such as ESOL classes, job training courses, and housing search workshops.”

Norfolk town officials said they met with Lt. Gov. Kim Driscoll on Saturday and learned the shelter will operate for six to 12 months.

“An unexpected influx of a large number of families poses many logistical challenges to Norfolk. Town Administrator Justin Casanova-Davis, Police Chief Timothy Heinz, Fire Chief Erron Kinney, Norfolk School Superintendent Ingrid Allardi, King

Philip Superintendent Rich Drolet, and other department leaders will be meeting regularly in the coming days," the town said in a statement Monday. "This group will develop a comprehensive list of potential impacts to the town and develop strategies to continue to deliver regular municipal services without interruption."

A razor fence around the facility will be removed, according to a spokesperson for the Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities.

The shelter is intended to serve families who are currently on the waitlist for the state's overburdened emergency family shelter system. Many of those families are spending their nights at Logan Airport, the spokesperson said. Once off the waitlist and placed in the emergency shelter system, families stay in more traditional shelter spaces, as well as motels and hotels.

The spokesperson said schools are receiving state financial assistance to cover enrollment and other costs tied to students staying at emergency shelters.

Grappling with dozens of migrant families sleeping at Logan Airport this winter, the Healey administration opened a controversial overflow site at a Roxbury community center in January with the capacity to house around 100 families. But the shelter based at the Cass Recreation Center is slated to close at the end of the month, the EOHLC spokesperson said.

To keep up with demand for emergency housing amid a crush of migrants in Massachusetts, officials are also planning to open a shelter at a National Guard armory in Lexington this month, the spokesperson said. It will be able to accommodate 55 families.

"The Armory is a State-owned property and we were not involved in the decision-making process to utilize this space as a shelter for families and children who are unhoused, including

those who have recently arrived in the State. This site is being organized and operated entirely by the State,” Lexington officials said last week. “This overflow shelter will operate as a closed facility. Only authorized personnel will be allowed into the building, which will remain operational as a hub for National Guard operations.”

“The Town of Lexington is proud to support local and regional efforts to ensure individuals and families have access to food, clothing, and shelter – no matter where they come from or how they arrive here,” said Lexington Town Manager James Malloy. “Our Town and this country were founded by those took action, not because they needed to, but because they wanted to. We will gladly follow the State’s lead in taking action to help those in need.”

Families staying at the Norfolk and Lexington shelters will need to be recertified each month, the EOHLC spokesperson. They must provide documents showing they have participated in case management and housing efforts, under requirements Gov. Maura Healey rolled out in March.

Massachusetts Median House Prices Rise To \$580,000 in March

By Colin A. Young
State House News Service

The signs of spring are all around: the days are getting warmer, baseball is back, and Massachusetts home prices are setting records as demand continues to significantly outpace

the inventory of houses for sale.

The real estate analysts at The Warren Group reported Wednesday morning that \$580,000 was the median price of the 2,563 single-family homes sold in the Bay State in March. That's a new all-time high for March and a 7.4 percent increase over the median price in March 2023. Meanwhile, the number of houses sold last month was down, also by 7.4 percent.

Cassidy Norton, associate publisher and media relations director for The Warren Group, said it was not surprising that the median price of homes continues to set records and suggested a reason for some optimism.

"Despite the increase, we actually aren't seeing the rapid, double-digit percent increases we were experiencing at the height of the pandemic and the subsequent months. Despite this slowdown, limited inventory will probably continue to be the biggest barrier to homeownership in the coming months," she said.

Through March, there had been 7,001 single-family home sales in Massachusetts in 2024, a 2.8 percent decline compared to the first three months of 2023. At the same time, the year-to-date median single-family home sale price is up 9.8 percent to \$560,000, the Warren Group said.

Condominium sales were also down last month to the fewest March sales since 2015 – 1,431 sales compared to 1,520 last March, down 5.9 percent. March's median condo sale price rose 10 percent to \$550,000, also a new all-time high for the month, The Warren Group said. Year-to-date, there have been 3,482 condo sales, a 6.2 percent drop from the first three months of 2023 while the median sale price of \$520,000 is an 8.3 percent increase over the same period.

Housing in Massachusetts is inaccessible or unaffordable for many residents, and Gov. Maura Healey last year identified

housing as “the number-one issue facing this state.” She said as recently as last month that “we are short 200,000 housing units in this state.”

In the fall, Healey filed a five-year, \$4.12 billion housing bond bill (H 4138) seeking to kickstart production of new housing units by, among other initiatives, allowing accessory dwelling units by right in single-family zoning districts. But her bill alone would not be enough to eliminate the state’s 200,000-unit shortfall. Healey’s office said in November that the bill would “unlock creation of 40,000 new homes statewide.”

The governor’s priority bill was sent Tuesday morning to its third legislative committee. The Committee on Bonding, Capital Expenditures and State Assets reported Tuesday that the massive housing bond and policy bill should not pass, citing the rule that governs how long a committee can review a bill. But instead of disposing of the matter, representatives moved Tuesday to send the governor’s bill (which has now gone unchanged through two committees) to the House Ways and Means Committee.

That committee is likely to redraft the governor’s proposal or at least bulk it up. Speaker Ronald Mariano said last month that he is “going to go big” when the House takes up housing legislation and plans to expand the governor’s \$4.1 billion bill in a number of ways, including by proposing to expand the Mass. Water Resources Authority service territory.

Mariano has said the House will consider the housing bill soon after it passes its annual state budget next week.

S&P cites New Bedford's 'very strong management' in affirming City's Bond Rating

"NEW BEDFORD – A leading credit rating agency has affirmed the City's credit rating, pointing to New Bedford's effective leadership and strong economic prospects.

Standard & Poor's recently awarded New Bedford a AA+/Stable long term enhanced rating and affirmed its AA-/Stable underlying rating, giving the City high marks for financial health and management. Among the key metrics the City scored high on were: Very Strong management, Very Strong liquidity, Strong economy, and Strong institutional framework. S&P uses 10 grade levels in its evaluations, from General Default to Strong, Very Strong and Extremely Strong.

"The ratings reflect our view of New Bedford's very strong management with strong financial-management policies and practices – including its quarterly review of budget-to-actual reports; detailed five-year capital plan that it updates annually, including planned funding sources; (and) investment-management policy that adheres to commonwealth statutes," the 2024 S&P Global Ratings report states.

"New Bedford's economic profile has benefitted from the city's diversification away from its traditional dependence on port activities, as well as from the city's relative affordability and investments to support offshore wind development," the report also stated.

"These high marks are a testament to the professionalism and commitment of our finance and economic development teams," Mayor Jon Mitchell said. "Our disciplined management of the City budget and our efforts to expand and diversify the regional economy are producing tangible outcomes – notably

lower interest rates that mean savings for taxpayers.”

The high credit ratings helped the City solicit several competitive bids and sell \$23.5 million worth of bonds and notes earlier this month. Proceeds will fund various capital projects.”-City of New Bedford.

Massachusetts Migrant Work Permits Stagnant Since December

By Sam Drysdale
State House News Service

Gov. Maura Healey has frequently pointed to getting more migrants authorized to work as a key step in moving people out of the state’s overwhelmed emergency family shelter system, but the number of new arrivals who have work authorizations has stagnated since December.

About half of the families in the state’s Emergency Assistance family shelter system are newly arrived immigrants, refugees or asylum-seekers, many of whom are not authorized to work in the United States. As the number of immigrants coming into Massachusetts has skyrocketed in the last year, Healey has repeatedly called on the federal government to expedite the work authorization process to help migrants who are eager to work leave state-funded housing and support their families financially.

With family shelter cost estimates of close to \$1 billion per year, both the House and Senate are now considering putting

time limits on how long a family can stay in emergency shelter. Shelter limits would add urgency to the need for these authorizations as parents would need to be able to work to pay for housing once they are no longer able to stay in the shelter system.

The House has proposed a nine-month limit on shelter stays, while the Senate will take up a bill later this week to impose a nine-month limit with opportunities for extensions. Either option would be a significant change to the system, where most families stay for over a year, according to the Healey administration.

“The federal government is allowing people into the United States. And my position has been, if you’re going to allow people in, then work with us states on getting people working – expedite those work authorizations,” Healey said last fall.

The administration held two “clinics” in November with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security to help process work authorizations for shelter residents, where they said they helped “thousands” of new arrivals become eligible to work in the country.

Though the clinics seemed to lead to a sharp increase in work authorizations, that number has since stagnated.

As of Dec. 12, 2023, 813 newly arrived immigrants, refugees or asylum-seekers in Massachusetts’ shelter system had federal work authorizations. That number climbed to 2,713 individuals two weeks later.

Since late December 2023, however, the number of non-citizens living in shelters and able to legally work in the U.S. has remained unchanged, according to reports from the governor’s administration.

The most recent report on the EA family shelter system to come out of the Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities

showed that as of March 7, there were still only 2,713 of these individuals with work authorizations.

A Healey aide said the work authorization numbers are derived from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and recommended reaching out to them.

Despite this stagnation, Healey continues to point at the success of the November clinics in expediting this process that she deems as critical to helping people out of shelter and opening up space for other families in need.

At an unrelated press conference at the State House on Monday, responding to a reporter's question about whether the migrant population is an "untapped labor market," Healey replied, "I do. That's why I've focused from the outset on getting work authorizations."

"I'm proud that we as a state have really led when it came to getting folks processed. I called on the federal government to act for a long long time, and I also said we're not going to wait. And so we were able to get folks from DHS here on the ground... That work has continued," she said.

The News Service followed up, pointing out there have been no new work authorizations reported by her office since late December.

"The work does continue... We continue to process people for work authorization," Healey replied. "It's a good thing right now that Salem Hospital was able to fill its janitorial and cleaning staff. It hadn't been able to do that for years. So we're continuing to look for opportunities."

She did not directly respond to a question on why her administration had not reported an increase in work authorizations over the last three months.

In the time since late December when the number of new

migrants eligible to work flatlined, hundreds of families have been added to the waiting list of folks waiting to be let into shelter. Around 400 families were on the waitlist – waiting for a spot after Healey capped the system at 7,500 families last fall. By early March, that number had reached about 780 families.

Earlier this month, the Healey administration announced partnerships with eight resettlement agencies to help families exit shelter by connecting with resources such as housing, job searching and social services. Healey's office said the initiative, funded by money included in last year's supplemental budget, will enable families to access permanent housing.

Wendy's Will Test Surge Pricing In Some Of It's Restaurants

Just imagine that you have been waiting in line at your local Wendy's during the lunch rush, but when you pull up to order everything on the menu is a dollar more than usual. That scenario may soon become real, because Wendy's plans on testing surge pricing that will increase the price of its spicy nuggets, burgers, Frostys, and other favorites during its busiest times. How do we feel about this? Uber does this for its rideshare app, but should is this a sustainable business practice in fast food?

Earlier this month, Wendy's CEO Kirk Tanner has this to say: "The fast food chain plans on investing \$20 million to roll out digital menu boards to US-based restaurants by the end of

2025. As part of the change, Wendy's will also introduce something called "dynamic prices" that will change the prices on the digital menu boards based on demand. It sounds similar to the surge pricing system implemented by Uber, which charges riders higher rates in busy areas."

"Beginning as early as 2025, we will begin testing more enhanced features like dynamic pricing and day-part offerings along with AI-enabled menu changes and suggestive selling," Tanner says. "As we continue to show the benefit of this technology in our company-operated restaurants, franchisee interest in digital menu boards should increase further supporting sales and profit growth across the system."

Won't this practice simply drive customers to their competitors or can we expect other industry leaders to follow suit? This vintage Wendy's ad reminds of the good times...



Wendy's®

**AIN'T NO
REASON TO GO
ANYPLACE
ELSE.™**

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