City of New Bedford unveils housing plan, housing instability relief, affordability

"Mayor Jon Mitchell joined other city officials and community leaders in announcing today Building New Bedford: Strategies to Promote Attainable Housing for All in a Thriving New Bedford, [attached] a comprehensive housing plan that outlines actions the City is taking to stimulate new housing development, reactivate underutilized properties, and relieve housing instability and affordability concerns for City residents.

The plan also serves as a call to action to New Bedford's surrounding towns to increase their development of multi-family housing in order to contribute to solving the region's housing shortage.

The Building New Bedford plan is comprised of 22 measures the City is taking to address the regional housing crisis, organized into six main areas:

• Facilitating New Housing Production Across Income Levels
• Making Use of Existing Housing Stock & Space
• Promoting Home Ownership & Independent Living
• Updating Regulatory Framework
• Establishing a Regional Approach on Housing Issues
• Addressing Housing Instability and Homelessness

Throughout the plan, the City articulates its objectives in fast-tracking housing development across income levels, removing regulatory barriers to housing development, facilitating the restoration of vacant, underutilized, and/or city-owned properties to be used for housing, encouraging

first-time homebuyers, supporting those with urgent affordability concerns, and setting an example for all municipalities in Greater New Bedford in addressing the region's collective housing challenges.

"The cost of housing in Greater New Bedford has imposed a heavy burden on families who are trying to make ends meet. While the causes of the problem are largely driven by national market forces, there are many steps we can take at the city level to address the challenge. With the benefit of input from housing advocates, developers, and the public, we are announcing a comprehensive plan whose focus is to increase the supply of available housing units, promote home ownership, and support those who are in danger of losing their housing. As the plan makes clear, the more we take a regional approach to the problem, the more traction we will gain, said Mayor Jon Mitchell."

The plan includes the commitment of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds and previously announced HOME-ARP funding, both of which are intended to address the negative economic impacts of the Coronavirus pandemic, which has contributed to the extreme escalation in housing costs. The plan also includes focusing the efforts of key City departments, including the Office of Housing and Community Development, on expediting urgently needed housing production.

"The most effective strategy to combat steep increases in housing costs is to get more units on the market," said Joshua Amaral, Director of the City's Office of Housing and Community Development. "That takes a concerted effort to recruit and facilitate future development while providing support for those experiencing housing instability now."

Building New Bedford lays out plans to streamline permitting and amend zoning regulations to encourage development alongside increasing funding for rental assistance, first-time homebuyers, emergency repair, and financial assistance

programs.

The development of the housing plan weighed feedback gathered during public meetings and consultations with housing advocates and other stakeholders as part of the Community Development Block Grant and HOME-ARP processes. Additionally, Building New Bedford cites MassINC's Gateway Cities Innovation Institute and mirrors industry-recognized best practices in housing development within similar cities.

Building New Bedford: Strategies to Promote Attainable Housing for All in a Thriving New Bedford is available on the City website at https://www.newbedford-ma.gov/housing-community-development/. For additional copies of the plan or for more information, please contact the Office of Housing & Community Development at 508-979-1500."