

I am here today representing the Housing Partnership Board; our board advocates for the development of affordable housing opportunities in Lexington. I am a member of the Board of Commissioners of the Lexington Housing Authority, a Town Meeting Member from Precinct 8, and I represent the housing authority on the Community Preservation Committee. Outside of Lexington, I serve on the Planning and Development Committee of Metro West Collaborative Development. I appreciate the invitation to speak today to your committee about my views on the need to require the inclusion of affordable and work force housing in any special permitting process.

I believe there is adequate evidence to support the need for Lexington to encourage the development of more affordable and low-income housing options. First, I would like to discuss the number of individuals and families who are on waiting lists for affordable and low-income housing at the Lexington Housing Authority and LexHAB.

At the Lexington Housing Authority, there are **159** individuals on the waiting list for the Federal one bedroom units. There are **88** families on the waiting list for Federal (HUD) Family Apartments. There is a centralized waiting list for all of the state public housing. It is noteworthy that **534** applicants on the state waiting list indicated Lexington as the place they would like to reside.

There is very little direct federal or state funding for the construction of new units of public housing. Almost all of the new affordable housing in Massachusetts has been built by partnerships of public and private entities; to that end, housing authorities often form non-profit entities to access 'Low Income Housing Tax Credits. As Caileen Foley, the Executive Director of the Lexington Housing Authority, said, "Housing Authorities have to be very creative to build more housing."

**LexHAB** maintains waiting lists for the properties that are included in Lexington's Subsidized Housing Inventory. There are **69** individuals on the wait list for one-bedroom apartments, **50** families on the wait list for two-bedroom apartments, **60** families on the wait list for three - bedroom apartments, **19** families on the wait list for four-bedroom apartments, and **2** families on the wait list for a five-bedroom apartment.

The second form of 'evidence' I would like to present is more anecdotal in nature, but I think it illustrates the need for more diverse housing stock. I am now going to describe some of the encounters I have had with folks as they have tried to find housing in Lexington.

Several months ago, Metro West Collaborative Development held a lottery at town hall for pre-qualified applicants on a general wait list for future vacancies at LexHAB properties. There were 136 applications for the waiting list. Applicants did not have to be present at the lottery, but some folks came to watch as their numbers were pulled. When the lottery was over, some of the folks stayed on and shared their stories with me. Their stories were very familiar to the stories I have heard from people who have contacted the Housing Partnership Board for assistance. (The partnership maintains a website which functions as a sort of a mini-clearinghouse for folks looking for guidance.) Although it would be inappropriate for me to identify any individuals I have met, the following are some descriptions of rather typical housing problems.

- A family with elementary school-aged children in Lexington that had to vacate their apartment because of mold and lead contamination.
- A recently divorced person facing financial difficulties.
- A young professional who had recently moved with his young family to the area who couldn't find an 'affordable' house to purchase in Lexington.
- A recently widowed mother of two small children who wanted to 'downsize' in Lexington and could not afford to do so.
- A single mother who had grown up in affordable housing in Lexington who wanted to move back to Lexington so her daughter could have the same educational opportunities she had had.

There has been much attention paid in community conversations and listening sessions about the importance of 'diversity' in Lexington. If the citizens of Lexington want to act on their stated support for diversity, they are going to have to put some political will behind requiring developers to be inclusive rather than continuing to build housing which is exclusive. Unless there are mandated requirements for the inclusion of affordable and work force housing in specially permitted projects, soon there will be no economic diversity in Lexington.

Finally, I would like to reference a statement that appears in the Appropriation Committee's Report to the 2019 Annual Town Meeting. I think it is an excellent description of the financial burden that escalating housing costs places on families and individuals in Lexington.

*"In FY2019, the tax bill for a single-family (SF) home of average value in Lexington ranked 8th in the state. Lexington's total annual property tax levy is also in the top ten and is exceeded by only a few of the largest cities in the state. This fact has far-reaching impacts on the Town due to the higher cost of living and the barriers to entry. High property values mean that low-and moderate-income families find it difficult, if not impossible, to afford a home in Lexington, and the tax burden further constrains the size of a mortgage that these households can afford. Retirees who purchased a home long before the current period of housing inflation often choose to move elsewhere because the growing tax burden threatens their fixed/limited in-come. The end result is a population dominated by comparatively wealthy families, many with school-age children."*