

WAYLAND STUDENT PRESS NETWORK

Exploring affordable housing in an affluent town

Jeffery Zhang, Aimee Smith, Selena Liu, and Kally Proctor

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Credit: [Selena Liu](#)

The Cochituate Village Apartments are one location for affordable housing in Wayland. The Wayland Housing Authority provides these apartments to senior or disabled people seeking housing.

When looking at per capita income, Wayland is the [14th wealthiest town](#) in Massachusetts. However, the wealth of the majority of the community does not invalidate the push for affordable housing in Wayland.

According to both state locals and politicians, including [Governor Maura Healey](#), the Massachusetts housing crisis is one of the biggest issues which state residents face today. Currently, there is a shortage of [170,870 houses](#) for low income renters in Massachusetts. The inability for some people to find affordable housing in the state has caused problems within the state in general, as well as within individual towns.

“[Massachusetts is] at this complete gridlock when it comes to purchasing a home, renting units and whether or not there’s any affordable units available,” [Family Promise](#) Executive Director Rachel Hand said. “That’s the housing crisis right now, and it’s leading to homelessness. [At Family Promise], we had at least two families this week that we could not do anything for. We had to tell them to sleep in their cars and one person broke down in tears.”

While affluent towns like Wayland aren’t dealing with the same levels of homelessness as other areas, [Chapter 40B](#) of the Massachusetts Housing Laws mandates that 10% of every town’s housing needs to qualify as “affordable.” According to the [Town of Concord](#), affordable housing is defined as housing that can be purchased by those who earn under 80% of the area’s median income.

“I think [affluent towns] have a responsibility now,” Hand said. “The crisis has become too hard for the cities to handle. A lot of these towns with white picket fences are like, ‘oh, this isn’t our problem, this is Boston’s problem.’ The reality is, those areas can’t solve this crisis alone.”

While Massachusetts has put into place several [laws](#) similar to Chapter 40B in order to improve the state housing situation, it can be difficult for Massachusetts to enforce these mandates on their own. Ultimately, like Hand said, the state will require the help of other towns and municipalities in order to solve the housing problem.

“It’s very hard for a state to enforce its will on local municipalities,” Wayland Housing Partnership member Rachel Bratt said. “The major thing that a state can do is withhold grants and withhold money. But, if the town is relatively affluent, as in the case of Wayland, it may choose to take the sanction instead of fulfilling the state mandate and doing something it prefers not to do.”

According to Executive Director of Wayland Housing Authority Brian Boggia, it is difficult for new homebuyers and young families to move to Wayland due to the high prices of housing and taxes. The average median household income for the state of Massachusetts is **\$96,505**, while Wayland’s is **\$208,750**. Additionally, the average median sales price for Wayland homes in February was **\$834,950**, while the average price for Massachusetts homes was **\$576,000**.

Map of Affordable Housing Complexes in Wayland

In total, Wayland has four affordable housing apartment complexes. However, there are also houses available to low income families in the community, which are incorporated into other neighborhoods in Wayland.

“The reality is [that] public housing is the most economical in the long run,” Boggia said “People don’t realize that low-income public housing is the most efficient affordable housing that’s out there. A lot of elderly people were excited about the Oxbow apartments, but [then] they found out they really couldn’t afford it. Oxbow is difficult to afford, whereas if they can qualify to come here, their rent is based on their ability to pay.”

Wayland prioritizes applicants with local preference, which means that they prioritize applicants who live or work in Wayland, or who have immediate family living in Wayland. Affordable housing applicants with local preference will likely remain on the waitlist for about two or three years. Those without a local preference may remain on the waitlist for up to five to 10 years.

“There’s almost no rental houses [in Wayland],” Bratt said. “So, we’re a town that has almost exclusively single family homes and, for the most part, these homes are quite expensive. Some of them are more modest, some of them less modest, but nothing is cheap in Wayland.”

Finding sites to build affordable housing is difficult in Wayland because some citizens tend to resist affordable housing and any type of development. According to Boggia, people tend to prefer things to stay the same, whether it be an empty or a forested lot, and would rather have affordable housing be built elsewhere.

“[If someone] bought their house with an empty piece of land next door, they don’t want a development to go there,” Bratt said. “Even if it’s a market rate development, they still would prefer to have that wooded area next to their home because that’s what they’re used to. And part of that is just human nature. People don’t like change.”

This shift in attitude regarding affordable housing could be key in fighting the housing crisis. One of the major barriers to the development of affordable housing in communities is pushback from community members. If town residents put up less resistance to the development of affordable housing, towns could further expand their housing projects.

“When I first started [as Executive Director of Wayland Housing Authority], there was a lot of resistance to affordable housing,” Boggia said. “Now, I think people get that we need affordable housing and that it serves a lot of needs in the community and helps to diversify the community. We can’t have everybody at the high income level living in town, so I think it helps the culture of the community to have some affordable housing.”

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“In order for towns like Wayland to combat the housing crisis, they need to start allowing their towns to have more diversity in them. In general, the number one thing that is causing a lot of the housing crisis is just this idea of entitlement to your property in the suburbs and not wanting to sacrifice what you have so more people can live there.”

— **Rachel Hand**

Director of Youth & Family Services and WaylandCares Prevention Coalition Jason Verhoosky provides services in areas surrounding mental health and family support. While they do not have an official role on the housing board, they often work directly with the housing board and the housing authority in town to ensure that their clientele has access to safe and affordable housing. While Verhoosky believes that there can be a connection between mental health or substance abuse issues and those who apply for affordable housing, every case is unique and is addressed on a case-by-case basis.

“People have images of large, ugly, brick buildings housing poor people with multiple problems,” Bratt said. “There is certainly some truth to these old stereotypes, but newer affordable housing is typically well-designed and fits in well with the local community. Regardless, people have perceptions and they’re afraid.”

While the affluence of some of Wayland’s residents might contribute to an unwillingness to see affordable housing be built near them, it can also contribute to resources that help organizations like Verhoosky’s to provide housing.

“When we do work with families that have a lower level of income and are struggling with housing, it’s wonderful to have the resources here in town to be able to ensure that we can help provide housing,” Verhoosky said.

In Wayland, organizations that focus on increasing the amount of housing include the [Wayland Housing Authority](#). However, according to Hand, in Massachusetts there are challenges when it comes to developing new affordable housing due to town zoning laws. These town zoning laws prevent construction, such as additional dwellings or accessible features, without approval.



Another example of elderly and disabled housing in Wayland is Bent Park, a colonial style apartment complex. According to Wayland Housing Authority Executive Director Brian Boggia, Bent Park is an example of subsidized housing which blends into the Wayland community. By repurposing existing housing as apartments, Wayland was able to increase the amount of affordable housing without destroying old structures to replace with new developments. (Courtesy of Brian Boggia)

While Wayland doesn’t have any general zoning bylaws that would prevent the construction of additional dwellings, there are two historic districts with construction regulations that currently do not have any affordable housing. However, former member of the Wayland Historical Commission, Planning Board and Community Conservation Gretchen Schuler believes it is possible for

someone to turn their house into affordable housing by adding temporary accessibility structures such as ramps.

“[Converting historical buildings to affordable housing] is difficult because most of them are not accessible unless you put in something that is detrimental to the overall appearance,” Schuler said.

Schuler encourages anyone considering modifying their historic property into affordable housing to work with the Wayland Historical Commission to do construction in a way that doesn’t destroy the historical elements of the previous home.

“If you can [make your home accessible] in a way that doesn’t destroy the historic fabric of the home, but rather simply adjust it for the time being, I think that people should be able to do that,” Schuler said.

Wayland’s **zoning restrictions** create space for the community to promote new affordable housing opportunities. Right now, Boggia’s aim for the future of Wayland’s affordable housing situation starts with providing housing opportunities for people with developmental disabilities, because affordable housing for people with developmental disabilities is scarce and the necessity can be overlooked.

“We’re working on a shared housing proposal, which is in the infant stage, for young people with developmental disabilities,” Boggia said. “There’s a need for that. It’s a clear need, and there’s been a lot of support.”

One way people can help improve the housing situation is by promoting affordable housing. According to Bratt, if residents promote affordable housing, it can lead to several positive impacts to the community down the road.

“[People can] try to promote [affordable housing] and try to communicate that it can be an asset to the community,” Bratt said. “When you have more housing that is available to more people, you have a richer, more diverse community. You have more opportunities to get to know people and [for them to learn about you.]”