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BSA's 2024-2025 Housing Advocacy Platform

The Boston Society For Architecture's (BSA) mission is to improve the quality of life for Boston-area residents by championing innovation in the built environment with a focus on sustainability and equity. As a result, the BSA has put forward this Housing Policy Platform to support and lead our advocacy measures and priorities in these key areas.

Massachusetts now has the second highest cost of living in the United States. Among the expenses that residents regularly account for is the high and rising cost of housing. This is due in part to high construction costs¹, which in turn leads to a lack of available housing options for residents. For context, Boston's metro area has one of the nation's lowest vacancy rates². The Massachusetts Housing Partnership estimates that Greater Boston is about 38,000³ housing units short of what we need today and across the state, 200,000⁴ more homes are needed by 2030 in order to help stabilize the cost of housing for residents. Yet, through October of 2023, barely more than 10,000 building permits had been issued across the state – an indication that even fewer homes could be created, further delaying the state's goals to build more homes by 2030. In the meantime, many residents across the state become or already are housing burdened and severely housing burdened, meaning households spend more than 30% or 50% of their income on housing. As the median sales price for single-family homes and condos in Greater Boston reached \$961,250 and \$750,000 in June of 2024, according to the Greater Boston Association of Realtors, we are committed to finding ways to support the production and preservation of homes in Greater Boston and beyond.

Massachusetts homes are also among the nation's oldest. Boston's metro area also has one of the highest median home ages, 58 years old, impacting the quality of available housing stock in the region.⁵ Older homes tend to be less energy-efficient and less resilient to environmental impacts than new construction and often may need to undergo renovations to ensure that they withstand the tests of time and climate. Thus, considerations for ways to support housing production, paired with considerations of our rapidly changing climate, are necessary to ensure that housing opportunities are available to all.

As an organization representing 92% of the registered architects in Massachusetts, we feel an obligation to support and advocate for design standards, policies, and innovative practices that will help address the housing crisis that we are currently facing. Below are our 2024-2025 Housing Advocacy Platform Priorities:

Accessory Dwelling Units: Supporting the production of ADU's that allow for more housing options, by increasing housing supply at the neighborhood scale, community resilience and diversity.

Financial Incentives for Affordable Housing: Supporting tax credits, grants, and other financial incentives for developers who include affordable units in their projects can encourage investment.

¹ Tim Logan and Catherine Carlock, "Boston Construction: How sky high costs drive the housing crisis," *The Boston Globe*, 22 Dec 2023, <https://apps.bostonglobe.com/2023/10/special-projects/spotlight-boston-housing/construction-costs/>.

² Daigo Fujiwara and Rebecca Ostriker, "Boston Housing: Beyond the Gilded Gate," *The Boston Globe*, 13 Oct 2023, <https://apps.bostonglobe.com/2023/10/special-projects/spotlight-boston-housing/beyond-the-gilded-gate/>.

³ Callie Clark, Dana LeWinter, and Clark Ziegler, "Center for Housing Data," *Massachusetts Housing Partnership*, <https://www.mhp.net/about-us/data>.

⁴ Governor Maura Healey and Lt. Governor Kim Driscoll, "Future of Work in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Report," *Mass.gov*, 10 July 2021, <https://www.mass.gov/doc/future-of-work-in-massachusetts-report/download>.

⁵ Jonathan Jones, "American Cities With the Oldest Homes," *Construction Coverage*, 12 Jan 2024, <https://constructioncoverage.com/research/cities-with-the-oldest-homes>.



Missing Middle: Massachusetts is currently losing its population, particularly among middle-income and high wage earners. Despite the exodus, Massachusetts housing shortage is expected to persist through 2030 when a shortage of 200,000 units is predicted. The BSA supports increasing the production of missing middle typologies, typically ideal for small parcels, and encouraging the renovation of existing building stock or other innovative measures, to produce housing that is affordable to middle income individuals and families.

Sustainable and green housing initiatives: All housing is not created equal. Many Massachusetts homes lack weatherization, energy-efficiency, ventilation, and air-conditioning. These less healthy homes tend to be occupied by lower-income households who can least afford upgrades. These households are further penalized by health risks and high utility prices which disproportionately burden their income. Advocacy can help address this inequality. The BSA supports promoting strategies for healthier homes that incorporate green, sustainable and climate-resilient elements.

Adaptive Reuse: The BSA promotes the conversion of underutilized buildings and infrastructure—such as warehouses, schools, and office buildings—into affordable housing. Recognizing the structural barriers to renovating unoccupied or condemned units and advocating for this approach as a cost-effective strategy that also helps preserve the character of the community.

Co-Housing and Cooperative Housing Models: Promoting innovative housing models that emphasize shared resources and community living can help reduce costs and foster community engagement. Across the country, cooperative housing efforts have been seen as an option for communities who seek more control over their spaces and who are in search of affordable real estate options⁶.

Universal Design Standards: Advocating for inclusive design that accommodates diverse needs can ensure that affordable housing is accessible to all, including the elderly and disabled.

Density Bonuses: The current housing crisis was exacerbated by soaring national residential construction prices which rose by 50% in the five-year period 2019-2024, partly due to supply chain issues related to the pandemic.⁷ Historically, construction prices tend to rise over time, occasionally stagnate, but rarely deflate except in response to economic collapse such as the 2007-2008 financial crisis. This suggests the most promising solutions to the current housing crisis may be through policies aimed at encouraging higher density residential development at a lower per cost per dwelling unit. BSA supports policies that allow developers to build more units than typically permitted in exchange for including affordable housing that can incentivize the creation of diverse housing options.

Seasonal Communities Designation: Communities most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change include low-lying Boston neighborhoods and other coastal and inland communities with dwellings located within FEMA 100-year flood zones. The BSA will advocate and support the proper establishment of an advisory council to assist in the development of programs and resources to address the housing needs of seasonal communities.

Streamlined Permitting Processes: Advocating for simplified and expedited permitting for affordable housing projects can reduce costs and allow construction work to begin more quickly, making development more feasible.

⁶ Keith Schneider, "Priced Out of Housing, Communities Take Development..." , The New York Times, 13 May 2024, <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/05/13/business/gentrifying-neighborhoods-community-coops.html>.

⁷ "Construction Inflation 2023," Construction Analytics, 20 Dec 2023, <https://edzarenski.com/2022/12/20/construction-inflation-2023/>.



Expanded Public Housing: Advocating for the renovation and expansion of public housing programs that increase financial incentives and simplify finance stacking to provide stable, affordable living conditions for low-income families.

Developing Housing on Public Land: Advocating for the design and development of housing across scales on public land, as one-fourth of land in Greater Boston is publicly owned with much of it vacant or underused, according to the 2024 Greater Boston Housing Report Card.⁸

Inclusionary Zoning: In 2023, Massachusetts ranked 15th from the bottom in terms of new residential construction starts. This imbalance between supply and demand is owing to myriad factors that have hampered Massachusetts residential construction for decades; a result of many factors like exclusionary zoning. The BSA advocates and supports policies that require a percentage of new developments to be affordable for low- to moderate-income residents and can help integrate affordable housing into various neighborhoods.

Transit-Oriented Development: The BSA advocates and supports policies that will encourage the creation of transit-oriented development to help integrate well designed urban spaces that bring people, activities, building, and public space together, contributing positively to urban development while addressing environment and social challenges. Such urban spaces offer residents and visitors options to more easily navigate a city, whether by walking, cycling, or by accessing transit service options throughout.

Community Engagement in Planning: Ensuring that local communities have a voice in housing development can lead to solutions that meet the specific needs of residents, promoting both affordability and sustainability.

The Boston Society of Architects board recognizes that architects can envision and deliver practical, affordable solutions to help alleviate the severe Massachusetts housing crisis, not only through architectural practice but also through housing advocacy. The need for solutions is urgent. It is essential for the AEC community to unite and address the intersectionality of housing and climate resilience, as vulnerable communities often face the greatest risks from environmental changes, making equitable housing solutions a critical component of any climate strategy. Through the adoption of this platform, the BSA Board is supporting codes, policies, and innovative design standards that will create feasible and long-term housing solutions for Massachusetts.

⁸ "Part II: Public Land: Opportunity or Obstacle? The Use of Public Land to Build (and Block) Affordable Housing," *The Boston Foundation 2024 Greater Boston Housing Report Card*, <https://www.tbf.org/-/media/tbf/reports-and-covers/2024/gbhrc-2024/special-topic-2024gbhrc-digital-sm2.pdf>.