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## NEWS

# Agawam presses to implement newly OK'd affordable housing plan

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Rosewood Way is Wayfinder's new affordable and market rate housing development in Agawam. (Don Treeger / The Republican) 12/14/2023



AGAWAM — A plan to improve the availability of affordable housing in Agawam is now getting a look by the state.

The town's 11-member City Council voted

unanimously last month to approve a proposed Housing Protection Plan shaped during a year of work with the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission that included surveys of residents.



The plan was developed because residents, especially young people and seniors, have been unable to find affordable housing due to the lack of availability.

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“Roughly 4.5% of our housing stock is affordable right now,” said Pam Kerr, director of Agawam’s Office of Planning & Community Development.





The plan was submitted by the town's Planning Commission to the state for further review and approval for funding.



Carpenter Paul Pennell of Holyoke installs door hardware on a unit at Rosewood Way, Wayfinder's new affordable and market rate housing development in Agawam. (Don Treeger / The Republican) 12/14/2023

Kerr said that any municipality in Massachusetts with less than at least 10% of affordable housing stock is “vulnerable” to real estate developers, under Chapter 40B — a state law that allows developers to build regardless of zoning laws.

Municipalities with over 10% available affordable housing stock can “retain local control over housing development” and are exempt from 40B projects, the plan said.

About one-third of Agawam's households make 80% or less of the local area median income, said Corinne Wingard, a former city councilor who spoke at the Dec. 18 council meeting when the plan was approved.

Wingard has been working with the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission on get the plan ready.

“With the implementation of this plan, we, as a town, can gain protection from other (outside developers),” Wingard said.

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In July 2023, Rosewood Way, a mixed-income, affordable housing project funded by MassHousing and developed by the nonprofit Wayfinders, was approved in Agawam. It is set to be ready by August.

Rosewood Way is a 40B project and is slated to help the town meet its affordable housing goal — as identified by the plan — to produce 62 units of such housing per year.







A view of Rosewood Way, Wayfinder's new affordable and market rate housing development in Agawam. (Don Treeger / The Republican) 12/14/2023

“This new development will also be 70% local preference,” Wingard said.

As the town waits to hear back from the state about whether funding for the plan will be approved, Kerr said the town can start working on some of the plan’s more immediate goals.

They include:

- Identifying municipally owned parcels that can be made into affordable housing.
- Possible adoption of a 40R Smart Growth Overlay District, which would create affordable housing as well as “missing middle” housing that meets the needs of a wider range of Agawam residents.
- Discussing potential opportunities with the Agawam Housing Committee, Housing Authority and town officials.

“We need more housing that is affordable to all,” Wingard said. “(This plan) suits Agawam and it meets our needs.”

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