

What Is the Amherst Municipal Affordable Housing Trust?

Updated July 2, 2021

The Trust's **mission**, as an instrument of town government, is to promote the town's affordable housing priorities as determined through the most recent town housing plan, particularly to create safe, decent, and affordable housing for our most vulnerable populations. [§§]

The Board of Trustees' (Trustees) primary purpose is to oversee the Amherst Affordable Housing Trust funds. At the 2017 Annual Spring Town Meeting, the Town amended the Trust bylaw to expand the Trustees from seven to nine members and incorporate the Housing and Sheltering Committee's purpose and responsibilities. The Trustees must include the Town manager per statute. The Town Manager has the authority to appoint members, which are required to be town residents "who would bring to the Trust relevant personal and/or professional experience and knowledge in real estate, finance, affordable housing, banking, architecture, social services, or the like." His appointments are subject to the approval of Town Council.

The **powers and authority** of the Trustees are set forth in accordance with MGL c.44 s.55C with the exception that the following three powers are subject to limitations per local bylaws: [§§]

- Any purchase, sale, lease, exchange, transfer or conveyance of any interest in real property must be approved by 60 percent of the voting members. [§§]
- The Trustees may incur debt, borrow money, grant mortgages and pledge Trust assets only in an [§§] amount not to exceed 80 percent of the Trust's total assets. [§§]
- Any debt incurred by the Board shall not constitute a pledge of the full faith and credit of the Town of Amherst and all documents related to any debt shall contain a statement that the holder of any such debt shall have no recourse against the Town of Amherst.

The 2013 Housing Production Plan (HPP) identified **unmet housing needs**, concluding a significant need for the following:

- Family rental housing, particularly for families with very low income [§§]
- Smaller affordable units for individuals, including persons now accommodated in the shelter [§§]
- Appropriate housing for students to reduce demand on the housing market in Amherst [§§]
- Preservation of existing affordable rental units [§§]
- Affordable homeownership for families with low- and moderate-income [§§]
- Housing for at-risk and special needs populations that require special services and handicapped accessibility [§§]

Five-Year Goals of the Trust: [§§]

Goal 1: Actively Foster Development of Affordable Housing [§§]

Goal 2: Support Homelessness Prevention Initiatives [§§]

Goal 3: Seek Opportunities to Promote Conservation-Based (housing and preserved open space) Development

Goal 4: Enhance Local and Regional Collaboration [§§]

Goal 5: Expand Availability of Direct Housing Assistance [§§]

Goal 6: Promote Outreach and Education

Goal 7: Identify and Secure Funding Resources [§§]

Current and Past Housing Trust Activities

Fostering Development of Affordable Housing

- Designated East Street School and Belchertown Road sites for affordable housing development
- Supported Valley CDC Studio Apartment development
- Secured MassHousing Grant to support consultant tasked with identifying affordable housing sites & 40R district; completed with proposal for 40R District in Downtown Amherst.

- Developed guidelines for submitting funding applications to AMAHT (completed).
- Developing a Town Housing Policy to set affordable housing as a common goal shared by the entire town government.
- Supported new Town bylaw change for “Inclusionary Zoning” that will allow more affordable units in future developments or payments *in lieu* to the Trust where a special permit is requested.
- Annual comments to Community Preservation Act Committee on funding priorities for community housing applications
- Developed COVID-19 Emergency Rental Assistance program for Amherst residents (ended June, 2021).
- Exploring possible homeownership development on Town property on Strong Street.
- Exploring possible affordable housing development on the former Hickory Ridge Golf Course, along West Pomeroy Lane.

Supporting Efforts to End Homelessness

- Homelessness Prevention program primarily focused on families threatened with eviction (CDBG-funded program operated by Family Outreach of Amherst)
- Outreach program to encourage local landlords accept applications from individuals and families who are homeless (collaboration with Amherst Department of Health)
- First ever Landlord Forum on Nov. 15, 2019, that will focus on financial and other resources available to support renting to persons who are very low income or homeless.
- CSPEC development initiative to expand case management services to assist in locating housing for and providing housing supports for individuals who are homeless (funded by Medicaid)
- Advocacy for continuation of the Amherst seasonal homeless shelter and for other services for homeless individuals and families
- Participating in the Town Homeless Systems committee

Public Education

- 2017 forum, “Working the Amherst Housing Puzzle: A community problem solving forum”
- Website: <https://www.amherstma.gov/2199/Amherst-Affordable-Housing-Trust-Fund>
- 2018 forum, “Act Locally to Create Affordable Housing”
- CHAPA (Citizen’s Housing and Planning Association) Grant received to provide consultation on building local community support for affordable housing (Municipal Engagement Initiative)
- 2019 forum: “Affordable Housing in Amherst: Opportunities for Growth”
- 2021 Housing Forums:
 - A Path to Affordable Home Ownership :https://youtu.be/XI_E56NDXbQ
 - Racial Equity and Affordable Housing. :<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XKrVAbi1SwQ>
 - Climate Change, Sustainability, and Affordable Housing. :https://youtu.be/6_hUvU7K0qg

Financial Support

Typical of other Trusts in the State, the Trust’s primary source of **funding** has been the Community Preservation Act (CPA). The Trustees believe they can benefit the town most by operating as an initiator – playing an active role that will optimize opportunities to utilize town-owned property to foster development of affordable housing and establish housing assistance programs, in addition to undertaking an educational and advocacy role.

- CPA funding to support affordable housing development projects and for Trust consultant.
- Anticipated funding from local short-term rental fees
- Possible funding from Inclusionary Zoning bylaw that allows *payments in lieu* of developing new affordable housing units
- Contributions from nongovernmental organizations
- Possible Community Development Block Grant funds; State grant of \$250k from bond issue
- Town Council may also award developers “Tax Incentive Financing.”