

An Act to Promote Housing Choices

Massachusetts home prices have increased at the fastest rate in the nation, and metropolitan Boston rent prices rank among the highest in the country. The Commonwealth must build enough diverse housing stock – single family homes, multi-family units, and small apartments -- to support our growing economy and to provide our growing population with housing choices. **Massachusetts must find new ways to encourage housing development.**

This new housing production should be concentrated in environmentally sound ways. Massachusetts laws should make it easier to build housing that supports transit-oriented development, revitalizes downtowns, uses existing infrastructure, preserves natural land where possible, and avoids unnecessary environmental impacts. The Baker-Polito Administration’s Housing Choice Initiative encourages and rewards municipalities for taking actions that result in housing production. *An Act to Promote Housing Choices* complements the Housing Choice Initiative by lowering barriers to sustainable housing production and adoption of planning and zoning best practices. **At the same time, the legislation respects the role of local decision-making.**

Massachusetts is an extreme outlier in requiring a supermajority vote of its local legislative bodies to change zoning laws, and we are the only state in New England that requires a 2/3 vote to change local zoning. In order to facilitate adoption of zoning best practices and appropriate housing production, *An Act to Promote Housing Choices* lowers the voting threshold to a majority vote for specific best practices.

The following local zoning would require only a majority vote of the local legislative body:

- Reducing dimensional requirements, such as minimum lot sizes, to allow homes to be built closer together.
- Reducing required parking ratios, which can lower the cost of building new housing and accommodate development on a smaller footprint.
- Creating mixed-use zoning in town centers, and creating multi-family and starter home zoning in town centers, near transit, and in other smart locations.
- Adopting “Natural Resource Protection Zoning” and “Open Space Residential Development.” These zoning techniques allow the clustering of new development while protecting open space or conservation land.
- Adopting provisions for Transfer of Development Rights (TDR), which protects open space while creating more density in suitable locations.
- Adopting 40R “Smart Growth” zoning, which provides incentives for dense, mixed-use development in town centers, near transit, and in other “smart” locations.
- Allowing accessory dwelling units or “in-law” apartments – small apartments in the same building or on the same lot as an existing home.
- Allowing for increased density through a Special Permit process promoting more flexible development.

This legislation does not mandate that any town adopt these zoning best practices; it simply removes the barrier of having to convince a supermajority of the legislative body to adopt them. In addition, the legislation authorizes adjacent municipalities to enter into agreements for sites that span multiple communities.