



COMMERCIAL REAL ESTATE INSIGHT & NEWS

The Bowditch & Dewey Real Estate Blog

Baker Administration Announces Housing Choice Initiative

BY PAUL C. BAUER • DECEMBER 14, 2017

On Monday, December 11, 2017, the Baker Administration announced the Housing Choice Initiative, which is intended to increase housing development in Massachusetts. The Initiative intends to meet this goal through several means.

Incentives. The Commonwealth would reward municipalities that create new housing and encourage sustainable, energy efficient development. These rewards would include eligibility for grants and financial resources.

Technical Assistance. The Administration creates a new technical assistance toolbox to assist municipalities in planning for new housing production. The intent is to streamline planning with the Department of Housing and Community Development coordinating technical assistance. In addition, MassHousing will provide an additional \$2 million for technical assistance funding.

Legislative Changes. Finally, the Administration is proposing legislative changes through “An Act to Promote Housing Choices.” The proposal would allow cities and towns to adopt certain zoning best practices by a simple majority vote, rather than the current two-thirds supermajority. These zoning changes include:

- Mixed-use, multi-family, and starter homes, and 40R “Smart Growth” zoning in town centers and near transit;
- Development of accessory dwelling units, or “in-law” apartments;
- Increased density through a special permit process;
- Transferable Development Rights and natural resource protection zoning; and
- Reduced parking requirements and dimensional requirements, such as minimum lot sizes.

It remains to be seen whether the Housing Choice Initiative actually achieves greater housing production in the Commonwealth. The proposed Act to Promote Housing Choices would constitute a meaningful change to ease the burden of modernizing zoning to allow denser projects in the right places. Carrots are good, but at some point we must have a discussion of mandated higher density zoning in transit corridors. Secretary Pollack is working hard to improve the Commonwealth’s mass transit system and as it improves, we will then have the tools necessary to support more housing and development in these corridors. It will be an opportunity that we cannot miss.