

[OPINION](#)

McFadden and Lamey: Creation of affordable housing will combat homelessness

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We have to talk about housing.

The Greater Lowell region has long been an area for business and education to take root and grow. From our universities and colleges, to small businesses and industry, opportunity lives here. Fostering growth is what we do. And for the region to grow, we have to talk about housing.

Access to housing helps us all. Businesses want storefronts that are appealing and inviting; young graduates looking for a job want a place to live that's safe and affordable. When a family expands, they look for neighborhoods that are walkable and flourishing. Access to affordable housing means all of these people can get what they need — a community where they can thrive.

Communities throughout the commonwealth are working to meet the needs of individuals who are homeless. Without access to safe and affordable units, individuals in homelessness have nowhere to go. Housed individuals and families without access to affordable housing remain at constant risk of homelessness, creating unnecessary stress and anxiety about meeting the most basic of needs — the right to a home.

Without the creation of new affordable units, even those with means will struggle to secure housing. In May 2021, the Department of Housing and Urban Development issued 70,000 housing vouchers to communities across the country to reduce homelessness during the pandemic. Massachusetts received 1,780 of these vouchers. As of February 2022, only 6.74% of those vouchers have been used to house people in Massachusetts — around 120 individuals and families. Even with money to pay rent in hand, people aren't able to find housing.

We understand that housing is how we end homelessness, and that affordable housing that is accessible and safe is the best way to create a stable foundation for individuals and families.

Homelessness creates a vicious cycle, and it's hard to break free. Regular employment is harder when you don't have a home, and it's nearly impossible to have a home without regular employment. A workforce that is safely housed is a workforce that's consistent, healthy and productive. More than half of the individuals living in

shelters report some level of employment, but how can someone sustain a job today when they may not have a bed tomorrow?

The creation of 300 affordable, accessible units in the region will go a long way toward ending homelessness in our area. We are committed to working with our partners in the business community, banks and nonprofits to work toward those units and their timely creation. We will continue to advocate for housing that meets the needs of those who most need it, because everyone deserves a place to call home.

Please join the Lowell Plan and the Greater Lowell Chamber of Commerce as we move forward to end homelessness in the region. We believe it can be done, and we encourage you to join us as we talk about housing. For more information about how you can help, please email talkabouthousing@commteam.org, or follow us on social media.

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