

GOVERNMENT

Healey-Driscoll: \$246 million toward state's housing crisis

Funds distributed among 20 MA communities



Governor Maura Healey speaks during an affordable rental housing awards ceremony held at 733-735 Broadway on May 18, 2023. The housing development is one of 27 across the commonwealth to address the state's housing crisis. From left, Undersecretary Jennifer Maddox and Lowell City Manager Tom Golden. MELANIE GILBERT — LOWELL SUN



Lowell City Manager Tom Golden with Governor Maura Healey during an affordable rental housing awards ceremony held at 733-735 Broadway on May 18, 2023. The housing project is one of 27 across the commonwealth to increase

the state's housing stock. Third from left, Boston Capital Managing Director Rich Mazzocchi, incoming Secretary Ed Augustus, Lt. Governor Kim Driscoll. MELANIE GILBERT — LOWELL SUN

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LOWELL >> Housing, housing and more housing was the theme of an outdoor afternoon ceremony at which the administration of Gov. Maura Healey and Lt. Gov. Kim Driscoll announced \$246 million to build and preserve 1,600 affordable and mixed-income housing units in 20 communities across the state, including Lowell.

“It’s just the beginning,” Healey said. “We know how crucial housing is for families around this state. We’re happy to make these grant awards today. There will be more to come to create housing for folks who desperately need it in a range of income levels across the commonwealth.”

The event was held on the grounds of the current headquarters of the Merrimack Valley Food Bank, which has been serving the community for 30 years. The nonprofit sold the property to Boston Capital Development, a multifamily housing investment company, and will relocate to a new and expanded location.

In its place on 733-735 Broadway will rise a \$30 million, four-story building with 52-units of affordable housing, that will also provide three permanent supportive housing units for formerly homeless families, said Managing Director Rich Mazzocchi.

“Most of the building will be demolished, but we will save two of the historic facades and restore those to their original condition,” he said. “The transition of this property from the food bank to an affordable housing community is fitting with both serving vulnerable households in this area.”

The crowd of more than 100 people applauded wildly after Undersecretary of the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development Jennifer Maddox read the names, types of development, and partners associated with each of the 27 projects.

“This award round is the largest announcement that we will make this year,” she said.

Lowell joins communities such as Boston, Braintree, Cambridge, Dracut, Fitchburg, Salem, Worcester and others in receiving the state funding for the affordable housing developments that are backstopped by American Rescue Plan Act money, state and federal tax credits, and other state and federal resources.

Funding and streamlining housing growth in the commonwealth is critical to continuing to expanding options for families, strengthen neighborhoods and create economic opportunities, Driscoll said.

“We’re committed to this work,” she said. “It’s important to tackle this housing crisis. We’re 200,000 housing units short right now, people are living longer and the community need is growing. The Governor and I believe that it is essential for our state’s future that we have more housing and certainly more affordable housing in the communities that people live in.”

That message resonated with UMass Chancellor Julie Chen who pointed out that the university graduated nearly 5,000 students last weekend.

“Housing is important on many levels,” she said after the event. “Our faculty and staff are all part of this community. Our graduates — we don’t want them to leave and go to some other place. They need to be able to have housing and good jobs so that they can stay in the region.”

Earlier this month, Chen was part of a roundtable hosted by U.S. Rep. Lori Trahan that discussed strategies to retain a highly educated and trained workforce to fill the jobs expected to be created by the CHIPS and Science Act signed into law by the Biden administration last August.

Housing is a vital piece of a strong economic policy said state Rep. Vanna Howard, who also said she didn’t want graduates from any of the state’s many educational institutions to leave, and would work with her colleagues to support the administration’s housing initiatives.

“It’s a crisis,” she said. “But help is here. It’s a good start.”

She was joined at the ceremony by state Reps. Rady Mom and Rodney Elliot.

Healey tapped Edward Augustus as the state’s first housing secretary in more than 30 years. The former Worcester city manager will lead a newly created Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities dedicated to tackling Massachusetts’ housing crisis.

The governor introduced him as a man “who gets to yes.”

Augustus said the state has to move faster to bring more housing units online.

“We need to get more of these projects underway,” he said. “We need to speed up that time because there are real people who need those housing opportunities. That has to be our urgent task.”

In the audience were executive directors of local housing authorities, such as Tha Chhan of Lowell Housing Authority and David Hedison of the Chelmsford Housing Authority. Housing authorities provide low-income housing to families, seniors, veterans and people with disabilities.

Both executive directors applauded the investment in affordable housing by the administration, with Hedison saying he had a lot of “hope” in the future of housing in Massachusetts.

“This is wonderful day to have such a large number of projects funded,” he said. “Our organization has about eight projects that are ready to go, and if they can speed up the process, we can house 500 more people — seniors, families, disabled, veterans — a lot quicker. I have hope. I truly have hope today.”

Lowell City Manager Tom Golden, who recognized City Councilors Paul Ratha Yem and Vesna Nuon for their housing-first focus, said the city was pleased to host the awards ceremony and cited a shared commitment to affordable housing by his administration, Mayor Sokhary Chau and the city council.

“We’re committed to stand with this administration to ensure everyone has an opportunity to have a roof over their head. Housing first for all of our residents,” he said.