



Massachusetts Municipal Association

MMA BEST PRACTICES SERIES

Recommendations for Effective Local Government Administration and Management from MMA Policy Committees

January 2020 • Volume 5 • Number 5

MMA Policy Committee on Municipal and Regional Administration Best Practice Recommendation: Local Process Changes to Ensure Sustainable Housing Production

BEST PRACTICE: Proactive local strategies to ensure sustainable housing production that matches your community's goals.

Community-driven housing production requires proactive approaches on behalf of municipal officials. By strategically updating zoning bylaws and ordinances, communities can encourage housing development that is consistent with the municipality's goals. The following are some recommendations:

1. Begin with a housing needs assessment, community master plan or housing production plan for your community. This can provide a roadmap for developers interested in building in your community. Build a local public awareness campaign around these housing initiatives to help inform the community.
2. Ensure that the renter population is aware of developments in their community. In many communities, notices of developments are mailed only to property-owning abutters. In order to encourage the participation of renters at development meetings, notice should be distributed to abutting tenants as well as property owners.
3. Planning and zoning board officials can consider having a "cooling off" period between community meetings and decision-making to ensure that decisions are not made in the heat of the moment. A sufficient amount of time could be one week, for example.
4. Permitting processes should be streamlined and transparent and available to developers. Processes should be standardized so that developers can understand when additional studies may be necessary ahead of time in order to avoid delays and extra money.
5. Planning and zoning board officials should understand how to frame the proposed development to community members and how best to give feedback on issues raised by community members. This should include considering the balance between the issues raised by community members and what is best for the city or town to meet development goals.

(continued, next page)

Resources:

- "Who Participates in Local Government? Evidence from Meeting Minutes," by Boston University professors Katherine Levine Einstein, Maxwell Palmer and David Glick: tinyurl.com/EinsteinPalmerGlick
- Massachusetts Housing Partnership Housing Toolbox: www.housingtoolbox.org/local-support/organize