

TOWN OF WESTON

Priorities and Criteria for Affordable Housing

Introduction

This document sets forth priorities and criteria that are intended to serve as guidelines for affordable housing developers and Town boards that have a role in development review. The priorities are also intended to inform Town voters about the general approach and criteria that may be used by the Trustees of a Weston Affordable Housing Trust. These priorities and criteria are the result of the Weston Housing Partnership's brainstorming and discussions assisted by a housing consultant beginning in March 2009.

Background. Weston is one of the Commonwealth's most expensive towns to live in, with land values and home prices exceeding those of most in the Commonwealth and many nearby towns. The pressures on Weston's housing market are intensified by its location along two of Greater Boston's most important highways – Route 128 and the Massachusetts Turnpike – which also play a role in Weston's desirability.

Weston has taken steps to address affordable housing needs. Over time, Weston has created 140 units of affordable housing, mainly for senior housing. (Appendix A.) In 2004, the Town commissioned a needs analysis, focusing on municipal employees and the families of METCO students attending the Weston Public Schools. Four years later, the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) prepared a housing study, *Weston Affordable Housing: Present and Future*, which identified several challenges that impede efforts to create affordable housing units in Weston:

- ◆ The lack of “construction-ready” land and the extraordinarily high cost of land;
- ◆ Low-density development regulations;
- ◆ Lack of local development capacity; and
- ◆ Difficulty in siting septic systems that will comply with Title V.

In 2009, the Board of Selectman formed the Weston Housing Partnership charging its members to establish a strategic plan for preserving and increasing affordable housing in Weston. Increasing the supply of affordable housing will require local commitment, leadership, and public education.

Purpose. The purpose of these Priorities and Criteria is to describe how Weston envisions increasing affordable housing opportunities. These P&C describe how affordable housing should be designed to fit within Weston's physical, historical and cultural landscape, and

what types of needs it should address. The chart attached is designed to function as a checklist and evaluation tool (Appendix B) when considering affordable housing projects.

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Priorities and Criteria

Affordability and Housing Needs

Weston has a significant shortage of units that are both affordable and appropriate for senior citizens and families. The Town encourages developments that address these specific local needs. All affordable units must be protected by a perpetual affordable housing deed restriction accepted by the Weston Board of Selectmen and approved by the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) under M.G.L. c. 184, §§ 31 - 32.

While at least 25 percent of the units in a Chapter 40B comprehensive permit development must be affordable, Weston encourages developers to provide more affordable units whenever possible. An increase in density may be considered in order to achieve this end. Weston would want the following types of households to have priority access to the additional affordable units that exceed the 25 percent minimum, to the extent permitted by law:

- ◆ Low- and moderate-income households;
- ◆ Senior citizens;
- ◆ Municipal/School employees; and
- ◆ METCO families.

Additional Preferences. A development that provides a wider range of affordability will be considered more responsive to the Town's housing needs. "Wider range of affordability" means the inclusion of not only units for "subsidized" households with very low incomes – below 50 percent of Area Median Income (AMI) – but also units for "moderate income" households that do not qualify under Chapter 40B income limits, but are nonetheless priced out of Weston's housing market. These households typically have incomes between 80 and 120 percent of the Boston statistical area median income (AMI), as defined by Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

Location

Weston encourages the reuse of existing houses and buildings for affordable and mixed-income housing. This redevelopment and reuse are preferred, as much of the Town is already developed, preservation of undisturbed open space is a priority, and affordable housing should be distributed throughout the Town.

Density

Affordable housing should be developed with low to moderate density and in buildings that will blend harmoniously and unobtrusively with surrounding neighborhoods.

Site Planning and Design

Architectural and site design choices are critical to the success of affordable housing proposals. A development that closely adheres to the Town's design priorities and criteria is more likely to receive a favorable review. A development that is out of character with surrounding areas, and designed without sufficient regard for its impacts on neighboring properties, will be discouraged, and will likely not receive Town support.

The Planning Board's review of site plan applications is guided by standards set forth in Section XI (F) of the Weston Zoning Bylaw. These standards matter because they address a development's physical, operational, and aesthetic compatibility with surrounding land uses, and help to ensure public safety. Developments that include affordable housing, whether proposed under a Comprehensive Permit or another permitting mechanism, should comply with the Town's site plan standards. In addition, the following factors need to be addressed in a developer's submission to the Town:

- ◆ Minimize land disturbance;
- ◆ Choose building designs that are similar to single-family homes, and substantially consistent with the principles described in *Preserving Weston's Rural Character*¹;
- ◆ Minimize massing and bulk;
- ◆ Design for safety, considering safety to the occupants both within the structure (building layout) and on the exterior (site layout);
- ◆ Utilize stormwater management during, and post construction.

Additional Criteria: Weston would like to see several preferences addressed in proposals for affordable housing. The Town understands that some of the following criteria will not apply in all cases. However, developers should respond to as many of these criteria as possible, and note those which are either irrelevant or infeasible.

- ◆ Provide accessible or adaptable units. (Multi-family developments may be required to provide accessible housing under the Massachusetts Architectural Access Board's regulations, the State Building Code, or both.)
- ◆ Locate parking on the side or rear of buildings.
- ◆ Design for walk-ability by providing sidewalks or informal pathways, or both.

¹ *Preserving Weston's Rural Character*, photographs and text by Pamela W. Fox, prepared for the Weston Planning Board, November 1998

- ◆ Design for a sense of community. Consider building and site layouts that encourage communication and interaction among residents of the development (e.g., common space within buildings, or common facilities, open space, or recreation areas).
- ◆ Protect historic resources by designing projects to avoid adverse impacts on structures with historic or architectural significance.
- ◆ Employ “green” development practices, considering both buildings and the site.
- ◆ Address sustainability in the design, construction, and operations/maintenance of the project.
- ◆ Conserve water and protect natural vegetation with:
 - ◆ Landscaping consisting of low - water - use plantings
 - ◆ Landscaping consisting only of non - invasive species
 - ◆ Stormwater management during and post construction, use BMPs wherever possible
 - ◆ Outdoor irrigation system that conserves water and relies on a private well
 - ◆ Minimize on- and off-site impacts during construction.

Some developments – especially if they involve new construction on vacant land – may be able to protect open space by design. In these cases, clustered buildings and compact building forms could help to achieve an appropriate density, and still leave much of the site undisturbed. Furthermore, developers should try to respond to the following open space preferences:

- ☐ Preserve at least 40 percent of the site as common open space;
- ☐ Design common open space so that it will be accessible to all residents of the development
- ☐ Comply with the Town’s minimum setback requirements

Additional Benefits to the Town

Like any other development submitted for review and approval by the Town, developments that include affordable housing may be required to provide mitigation (e.g.: traffic and/or infrastructure) at a level appropriate to the size and location of the project. Developers will also be expected to pay the reasonable cost of peer review services deemed necessary (e.g.: traffic or infrastructure).

Affirmative Marketing and Local Preference

Weston wants to ensure that affordable housing meets local housing needs, and also creates opportunities for new people to move into the community. Affirmative marketing plans, a lottery process, and monitoring for rental (long term) and homeownership units must be designed, and should provide a significant inclusionary role for the Town. Developers shall retain a competent, experienced lottery consultant acceptable to the Town, in order to insure compliance with all fair housing and marketing requirements, in addition to qualifying applicants. To the maximum extent permitted by law, at least 50 percent of the affordable units in a

development should be offered, on a priority basis, to Weston residents or people with direct ties to the Town, including:

- An individual or family legally residing in the Town of Weston;
- A household with at least one person employed by the Town of Weston
- A family with a child attending the Weston Public Schools under the METCO Program.
- A person with disabilities (or a household with a family member with a disability);
- Single parent families
- Military personnel

Further Preferences. Weston will also encourage developers to provide other public benefits in addition to affordable housing, such as:

- Preservation and reuse of existing structures;
- Pedestrian amenities;
- Contribution to address capital improvement needs directly related to the project; and/or
- Contribution to Town’s affordable housing fund.

Appendix B: Project Review Checklist

POLICY/PREFERENCE	Policy Applies (Y/N)			
	Single-family dwelling or group home	Group Home	Small projects (≤ 8 Units)	Larger projects
HOUSING AFFORDABILITY				
Percentage of Affordable Units				
Development provides 25% or more affordable units	N	N	Y	Y
To the extent allowed by law, affordable units over the 25% minimum will be offered on a priority basis to:				
Low- and moderate-income households	N	N	Y	Y
Seniors	N	N	Y	Y
Municipal employees	N	N	Y	Y
METCO families	N	N	Y	Y
People with disabilities	N	N	Y	Y
Veterans	N	N	Y	Y
Income Targets				
One or more units priced for households at/below 70% area median income (AMI)	High priority	High priority	High priority	High priority
Includes any units priced for households at or below 50% AMI	N/A	High priority	N/A	Priority
Includes any units priced for households with incomes between 81-120% AMI	Priority	Priority	Priority	Priority

Term of Affordability				
Use restriction will be perpetual	Y	N/A	Y	Y
LOCATION				
Site is already developed and involves reuse of an existing building	N	Y	Y	Y
DENSITY AND SCALE				
Density appropriate for parcel -	N	N	Y	Y
Near the town center, in the vicinity of the train stations, or for projects involving redevelopment and reuse of existing buildings, more than four units per acre may be considered	N	N	Y	Y
For new construction, building height does not exceed three stories	Y	Y	Y	Y
SITE PLAN STANDARDS				
Substantially conforms to ZBL Section XI(F), Standards and Criteria	Y	Y	Y	Y
Minimizes land disturbance	Y	Y	Y	Y
Minimizes construction impacts	Y	Y	Y	Y
BUILDING & LANDSCAPE DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS				
Building designs substantially consistent with principles described in "Preserving Weston's Rural Character," Vol. 2	Y	Y	Y	Y
Building(s) are very similar to single-family homes	Y	Y	Y	N
Massing and bulk are minimized	Y	Y	Y	Y
Project designed for safety, both interior (building layout) and exterior (site)	Y	Y	Y	Y
Includes accessible or adaptable units	N	Y	Y	Y
Side and/or rear parking	N	Y	Y	Y
Walkability: sidewalks, internal pathways	N	Y	Y	Y
Design reinforces sense of community; encourages communication, interaction	N	Y	Y	Y
No adverse impact on historic/architectural significance	Y	Y	Y	Y
Building and site employ green features (design, construction, operations/maintenance)	N	N	Y	Y
OPEN SPACE & NATURAL RESOURCES				
Preserves at least 40 percent of the site as open space	N	N	Y	Y
Open space is accessible to all residents of the development	N	N	Y	Y
Adheres to town's minimum setback requirements	Y	Y	Y	Y
Landscaping composed of low-water-use plantings	N	N	Y	Y
Landscaping composed only of non-invasive species	N	N	Y	Y
Outdoor irrigation system designed to conserve water, relies on private wells	N	N	Y	Y
HOUSING DIVERSITY				
Project increases the types of housing options available to one or more of the following groups:				
Seniors	Y	Y	Y	Y
Families	Y	Y	Y	Y
People with disabilities	Y	Y	Y	Y
PUBLIC BENEFITS				
Project provides public benefits in addition to affordable housing, such as:				
Adequate funding for town boards to obtain project review assistance from independent consultants	N	N	Y	Y

Preservation and reuse of existing structures	Y	Y	Y	Y
Pedestrian amenities	N	N	Y	Y
Traffic mitigation	N	N	Y	Y
Contribution to a local capital improvements project appropriate to the scale of proposed development	N	N	Y	Y
Contribution to Town's affordable housing fund	N	N	Y	Y
FAIR HOUSING & LOCAL PREFERENCE				
Local Preference Units				
Offers up to 50% local preference units	Y	Y	Y	Y
Affirmative Marketing Experience				
Team includes town-approved consultant/organization with prior affordable housing lottery experience	Y	Y	Y	Y
Town will have a significant role in affirmative marketing, lottery process	Y	Y	Y	Y

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