



Commonwealth of Massachusetts
EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF HOUSING AND LIVABLE COMMUNITIES
100 CAMBRIDGE STREET, SUITE 300
BOSTON, MA 02114

2026 Housing Choice Initiative Designation Application



Request for Responses (RFR)

Agency Document Number: EOHLC2026-52
COMMBUYS Bid Number: BD-26-1076-OCDDE-CS002-124072
Division: Livable Communities Division

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Overview

This is the ninth year the Commonwealth has offered the Designation as part of the Housing Choice Initiative. As of 2026, the program is comprised of two designation programs: the Housing Choice Community (HCC) Designation and the Rural and Small Town Housing Choice Community (RST-HCC) Designation. The term of designations is 5 years. Communities designated in 2026 will remain designated until 2031.

The Designation application period opens at the beginning of each calendar year. Currently designated communities whose designation does not expire in 2026 do not need to submit a new Designation application until the year of their designation expiration, but must verify their most recent best practice data. Currently designated communities will be contacted by Housing Choice Initiative staff to update their current best practices and should not submit an application in advance.

**2026 Designation applications are due
5:00 p.m. on Friday, February 27, 2026.**

Designation Application

To complete the HCC or RST-HCC Designation application, you will need information about the number of year-round housing units permitted over the last 5 years and implementation of certain housing best practices and policies. Refer to the [HCC](#) or [RST-HCC](#) 2026 Designation Criteria and Best Practices to determine which eligibility criteria your City/Town may meet. Visit [the Designation application webpage](#) for more information and to complete and submit an application.

Housing Units Information

Provide your community's total year-round housing units from the 2020 Census and the net new year-round housing units from 1/1/2021 through 12/31/2025. You may use either A) US Census Building Permit Survey (BPS) data and/or B) your local building permit data to document net new housing units in your community. Refer to the HCC and RST-HCC 2026 Designation Criteria and Best Practices for the definition of “net new units.”

Best Practices and Policies to Promote Housing

Select and provide evidence of all best practices your City/Town meets. You may use excerpts of zoning bylaws, copies of planning or zoning documents, and any documentation that proves implementation. Note that all applicants must submit information about best practices, even if you do not need them to be eligible to designate.

Navigating the Application

The application **cannot** be saved. You may use the sample applications provided to prepare your City/Town's data and information and complete the application when ready. If you have problems uploading materials, please email mckenzie.bell@mass.gov to request to submit

materials by email. Only [complete the application](#) and upload materials when you are ready to submit. To submit the application, the person submitting the application must check an attestation about the accuracy of information and authority to submit the application on behalf of your City/Town.

Designation Application Review

A review panel will evaluate all designation applications to determine whether the City/Town meets HCC or RST-HCC eligibility criteria. The review panel may contact the City/Town to request more information or additional materials.

To avoid last-minute problems submitting your application, submit as soon as possible. If you have questions, contact McKenzie Bell, Senior Community Grants Coordinator at mckenzie.bell@mass.gov.

2026 HCC Designation Criteria and Best Practices

To be considered for the HCC Designation, a City or Town must meet one of the four Eligibility Criteria below for the appropriate designation. Evidence related to each criterion must be in the form of building and/or foundation permits and best practices documentation, as applicable, over the last 5 calendar years (2021-2025).

HCC Eligibility Criteria

- 7% growth **OR** 700 new units (no best practices)
- 5% growth **OR** 500 new units, **PLUS** 5 of 21 best practices (at least 2 from Affordable category)
- 3% growth **OR** 300 new units, **PLUS** 8 of 21 best practices (at least 4 from Affordable category)
- 1.5% growth **OR** 150 new units, **PLUS** 12 of 21 best practices (at least 6 from Affordable category)

Additional Eligibility Conditions and Evidence

- ✓ Rural and Small Towns¹ defined as municipalities with a year-round population of 7,000 or less OR less than 500 people per square mile are eligible and may only apply for RST-HCC Designation consideration.
- ✓ MBTA Communities determined to be noncompliant with the MBTA Communities Law (M.G.L. c.40A s.3A) and regulations (760 CMR 72.00) are ineligible for the Designation.
- ✓ Permitting evidence may be submitted in the form of U.S. Census Building Permit Survey (BPS) data and/or data directly from a municipality's own issued permits.
- ✓ Permitting evidence must be in the form of building permits and/or foundation permits and does not include occupancy permits or other approvals made before a building permit is issued.

¹ Find the list of the 181 Rural and Small Towns that meet this definition at <https://www.mass.gov/doc/rural-and-small-town-designation-list-2024/download>

2026 New Units Count Pilot

Homes that have been rehabilitated to improve their livability in the past 5 years can count as a “net new unit” for the purposes of the Designation application after either:

- A. having been cited for building or sanitary code violations, **OR**
- B. were subject to cancellation of commercial property insurance due to substandard property conditions, **OR**
- C. were otherwise blighted² or substandard³

2026 HCC Best Practices

The tables below list all 21 Best Practices (BP) by category, describe each BP, and show the possible number of possible BPs that each may count toward HCC eligibility criteria.

Table 1: HCC Affordable Best Practices

| # | Affordable Best Practices | Possible BP Count |
|----|---|-------------------|
| 1. | Inclusionary Zoning: Have Inclusionary Zoning with density bonuses that provides for reasonable density increases so that housing is not unreasonably precluded. | 1 BP |
| 2. | 40R/40Y District: Have an approved 40R Smart Growth or 40Y Starter Home district that remains in compliance with the program. <i>This BP will count as two for communities that have permitted units in their approved district(s) in the last 5 years.</i> | 1 or 2 BPs |
| 3. | Transit-Oriented Development: Have created new districts, changed zoning, or dedicated local resources to incentivize transit-oriented development or made local investments to create/improve public transit or multi-modal options connecting housing to other areas, such as, but not limited to, multi-use paths/trails, pedestrian infrastructure, or micro-transit options (such as, but not limited to, Council on Aging or other like-transit options) in the last 5 years. | 1 BP |
| 4. | Housing Rehab Funding: Have designated local resources to rehab vacant and dilapidated properties in the last 5 years, such as but not limited to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Established a local housing rehab program Spent local funds on housing rehab (such as, but not limited to, CPA/CDBG/HOME funds) Dedicated municipal staff to promote and provide technical assistance to housing rehab Worked with a regional entity to increase capacity to implement local rehabilitation programs | 1 BP |

² “Blighted” means the home’s condition is detrimental to safety, health, or welfare because the home is out of repair, physically deteriorated, unfit for human habitation, or obsolete.

³ “Substandard” means conditions that, by reason of dilapidation, overcrowding, faulty arrangement or design, lack of ventilation, light, and/or sanitation facilities, are detrimental to safety, health, or welfare.

| # | Affordable Best Practices | Possible BP Count |
|----|---|-------------------|
| 5. | Local Rehab Collaboration: Demonstrate at least two of the following in the last 5 years: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Municipal staff participation in Housing Rehab Training • Promoted home efficiency or rehab programs, such as Mass Save, the Neighborhood HUB Habitat for Humanity, or other statewide housing rehabilitation programs • Worked with local organizations and home builders to complete rehabilitation projects • Other local actions to collaborate with other communities, regional entities, or other collaborative efforts that promote housing rehab | 1 BP |
| 6. | 40B Approval: Have a demonstrated pattern of accepting 40B projects in the last 5 years without imposing conditions that render projects uneconomic or unfeasible. 40B projects that result from having a local comprehensive permit decision overturned by the Housing Appeals Committee (HAC) do not count towards this best practice. | 1 BP |
| 7. | Subsidized Housing Inventory: Demonstrate at least one of the following related to Subsidized Housing Inventory (SHI): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SHI units that equal or exceed 10% of total year-round housing stock according to HLC's SHI • Increased SHI units by at least 2.5% in the last 5 years <p><i>This BP will count as two for communities that meet both.</i></p> | 1 or 2 BPs |
| 8. | Local Actions that Support Housing: Demonstrate at least three of the following local actions for housing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Currently have an Affordable Housing Trust (AHT) or Community Preservation Act (CPA) Committee • Have an AHT with an active local funding program • Allocated over 10% CPA funds for housing projects in the last 5 years • Re-use or redevelopment of local donated or surplus land for housing in the last 5 years • Collaboration with state agencies to promote the redevelopment of state surplus land into housing that resulted in successful RFP/Auction in the last 5 years • Adopted local option property tax relief programs for income-eligible seniors as provided for by statute (MGL c. 59 section 5) or through a home rule petition • Adopted a Community Impact Fee for short-term rentals (MGL c. 64G, section 3D) that is committed in writing to use a portion of such revenues for affordable housing | 1 BP |

| # | Affordable Best Practices | Possible BP Count |
|---|---|-------------------|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implemented policies or initiatives to promote missing middle housing in the last 5 years Implemented other locally identified creative pro housing strategies not listed here in the last 5 years | |

Table 2: HCC Other Best Practices

| # | Other Best Practices | Possible BP Count |
|-----|---|-------------------|
| 9. | Multi-Family Zoning: Have at least one multi-family zoning district or form-based zoning that allows for multi-family housing (allowing 2 units or more, not including ADUs) as of right (in addition to any 40R or 3A district/s) that does not restrict development by age of occupant or number of bedrooms. | 1 BP |
| 10. | City/Town-Wide Multi-Family Zoning: Have city- or town-wide multi-family zoning (allowing 2 units or more, not including ADUs) as of right. | 1 BP |
| 11. | Mixed-Use Zoning: Have at least one zoning district that allows residential/mixed-use development as of right (which is not part of a 40R district), such as but not limited to a downtown, village center, or like district. | 1 BP |
| 12. | Cluster Development: Have at least one zoning district that allows Cluster or Open Space Residential Development (OSRD). | 1 BP |
| 13. | Accessory Dwelling Units (ADU): Have adopted or amended local zoning bylaws since the implementation date (2/2/2025) of MGL c. 40A s. 1A and s. 3 and 760 CMR 71.000, the state's ADU law and regulations. | 1 BP |
| 14. | Zoning Incentives: Have implemented at least two of the following pro-housing policies that remove zoning barriers to produce housing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do not require more than one parking space per unit for multi-family units Reduced minimum lot sizes and set-back rules Allow for greater building height and density Allow for an as-of-right Flood Plan review Do not prohibit the construction of manufactured homes Other local zoning changes that remove barriers to permit and promote new homes | 1 BP |

| # | Other Best Practices | Possible BP Count |
|-----|---|-------------------|
| 15. | Resilient Buildings: Have development standards or programs that incentivize decarbonization, including energy efficiency for new construction and/or rehabilitation, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low-impact development (LID) practices • Stretch Code • Renewable energy integration • Participation in the Energy Star program | 1 BP |
| 16. | Climate Resiliency Planning: Have created or updated a climate resiliency plan in the last 5 years that includes a vulnerability assessment, adaptation strategies, mitigation actions, governance and coordination strategies, and monitoring and evaluation processes. | 1 BP |
| 17. | State-Led Housing Program Participation: Participation in at least two of the following in the last 5 years: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing Development Incentive Program (HDIP) • Have an Urban Center Housing Tax Increment Financing (UCH-TIF) district • Adopted or updated an Urban Renewal Plan that includes a significant housing production element • Other HLC, Mass Housing Partnership (MHP), MassHousing, MassDevelopment, or CEDAC-led program or initiative that focuses on housing production, ending homelessness, or improving community livability | 1 BP |
| 18. | Housing Production Plan: Have an HLC-approved or -certified Housing Production Plan (HPP) at the time of designation application. <i>This BP will count as two for certified HPPs.</i> | 1 or 2 BPs |
| 19. | Housing Plan Implementation: Implemented at least three strategies identified in an HLC-approved HPP. (The 3 strategies must be different than the BPs listed here.) | 1 BP |

| # | Other Best Practices | Possible BP Count |
|-----|---|-------------------|
| 20. | <p>Land Use Board Training: Provided education and training in the last 5 years for land use board members (Planning Board, Board of Appeals, Select Board, and/or City Council) from:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Citizen Planner Training Collaborative (CPTC) • Massachusetts Housing Partnership's (MHP) Housing Institute • Citizens' Housing and Planning Association's (CHAPA) Housing Summit or Massachusetts Housing Leadership Academy • Community Development Partnership's Lower Cape Housing Institute • Urban Land Institute's (ULI) Urban Plan Public Leadership Institute • Southern New England American Planning Association (SNEAPA) • Regional Planning Agencies (RPA) | 1 BP |
| 21. | <p>Regional Collaboration: Participated in a regional planning effort with other Cities and Towns or collaborated with neighboring Cities and Towns to tackle regional matters related to housing in the last 5 years. Note that working with your RPA to conduct a municipal-specific plan does not count for this best practice.</p> | 1 BP |

2026 HCC Designation Application Sample

Please note this is a sample to assist you in preparation to submit an [HCC Designation Application](#). This sample should not be submitted as an attachment as part of your application or submitted to HLC via email instead of a complete online application. Submission of this sample will not be considered a complete designation application.

Welcome to the 2026 Housing Choice Community (HCC) Designation application. If your City/Town is [designated as Rural and/or Small Town](#), please complete the [2026 Rural and Small Town Housing Choice Community \(RST-HCC\) Designation application](#).

Section 1: Information About Your City/Town

In this section, provide information about your City/Town, including contact information, eligibility criteria, and count of year-round housing units.

Table 3: HCC Designation Application Section 1 Sample

| Question | Entry |
|---|---|
| 1.1 City/Town | |
| 1.2 Application Point of Contact (First) | |
| 1.2 Application Point of Contact (Last) | |
| 1.3 Point of Contact Email | |
| 1.4 City/Town Legal Address (Street Address) | |
| 1.4 City/Town Legal Address (Address Line 2) | |
| 1.4 City/Town Legal Address (City) | |
| 1.4 City/Town Legal Address (ZIP / Postal Code) | |
| 1.5 First-time or Renewal Designation Application? | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Applying for first-time designation• Applying to renew designation expiring in 2026• Applying to renew designation that expired before 2026 |
| 1.6 Is your City/Town an MBTA Community that has been determined to be noncompliant with M.G.L. c.40A Section 3A of the Zoning Act (the MBTA Communities Act) and its regulations (760 CMR 72.00)? Note: Noncompliant MBTA Communities are not eligible for Designation. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• NO: City/Town has received a District Compliance Determination letter and is compliant.• NO: City/Town is in conditional compliance.• NO: City/Town is in interim compliance.• YES: City/Town is non-compliant.• N/A: City/Town is not an MBTA Community. |
| 1.7 Does your City/Town have any active housing restrictions or restrictive bylaws, such as | YES/NO |

| Question | Entry |
|---|-----------------|
| <p>phased growth zoning, sewer moratorium, or housing moratorium?</p> <p>If yes, you must provide a copy of the ordinance(s) and/or bylaw(s) that established the restriction.</p> | |
| 1.7.a. Housing Restriction Upload | |
| 1.7.b. Provide a brief narrative/description of your City/Town's housing restriction/restrictive bylaw. | |
| <p>1.8 Has your City/Town conducted an ADA Self-Evaluation and Transition Plan?</p> <p>If no, your City/Town must enter into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with HLC and the Massachusetts Office on Disability (MOD) to conduct such plan within 5 years to be eligible for Designation. Completing an ADA MOU is a condition of the Designation.</p> | YES/NO/NOT SURE |

Housing Units Information

STOP: Please make sure you have the following information before you continue the application.

- Year-Round Housing Units:** [Find your City/Town's total 2020 year-round housing units](#) from the 2020 Census as provided by HLC.
- New Units:** Compile your City/Town's **total net increase in year-round housing units** from January 1, 2021, through December 31, 2025. You must use local data for calendar year 2025. For calendar years 2021 - 2024, you may use either **A)** US Census Building Permit Survey (BPS) data **and/or B)** your local building permit data/records to document net new housing units in your community. Foundation permits may also count towards your City/Town's total of new units.
- 2026 New Units Count Pilot:** Homes that have been rehabilitated to improve their livability in the past 5 years may count as a net "new unit" for purposes of Designation application after either: **A)** having been cited for building or sanitary code violations, **OR B)** were subject to cancellation of commercial property insurance due to substandard property conditions, **OR C)** were otherwise blighted or substandard.

Table 4: HCC Designation Application Section 1 Housing Units Sample

| Question | Entry |
|---|---|
| <p>1.9 What is your City/Town's 2020 Census count of year-round housing units?</p> <p>2020 year-round housing units are available in the link above and for download at https://www.mass.gov/how-to/apply-for-the-housing-choice-designation.</p> | |
| <p>1.10 What is the number of New Units permitted PER CALENDAR YEAR between 2021 and 2025? If Building Permit Survey (BPS) data for any years between 2021 and 2024 are accurate, you may insert those BPS numbers. If BPS data is incorrect, you may insert local data. You must provide local data for 2025 (as published BPS data for 2025 is not yet available). See the above description of qualifying New Units, including the 2026 New Units Count Pilot.</p> | <p>2021:</p> <p>2022:</p> <p>2023:</p> <p>2024:</p> |
| <p>1.11 What is the total of New Units permitted between January 1, 2021, and December 31, 2025?</p> | |
| <p>1.12 Calculated percent increase in year-round housing units (net new units/2020 Census count of year-round units*100):</p> | |
| <p>1.13 Select the eligibility criteria your City/Town is applying under:</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 7% growth OR 700 new units (no best practices) • 5% growth OR 500 new units, PLUS 5 of 21 best practices (at least 2 from Affordable category) • 3% growth OR 300 new units, PLUS 8 of 21 best practices (at least 4 from Affordable category) • 1.5% growth OR 150 new units, PLUS 12 of 21 best practices (at least 6 from Affordable category) |
| <p>1.14 For evidence of new units between 2021 and 2024, are you using any BPS data?</p> | <p><input type="checkbox"/> 2021</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 2022</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 2023</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 2024</p> |
| <p>1.14.b Upload Local Building Permit Data</p> | |

Section 2: Housing Choice Best Practices

Please review the Best Practices below. If your community meets a best practice, select "yes," upload evidence/documentation as proof, and briefly describe how your community meets the best practice.

NOTE: If your City/Town is applying under the eligibility criteria of 7% or 700 new units, you must select and provide proof of best practices your City/Town meets. While proof of best practices is not required under this eligibility criteria, you must provide best practices and proofs to submit a complete application and be considered for Designation.

Affordable Best Practices

Reference the eligibility criteria above to determine how many affordable best practices your City/Town must meet to qualify for Designation.

Table 4: HCC Designation Application Section 2 Sample

| Question | Entry |
|--|--------|
| 2.1 Does your community meet the Inclusionary Zoning Best Practice? | YES/NO |
| 2.1.a Upload proof of Inclusionary Zoning | |
| 2.1.b Narrative about Inclusionary Zoning | |
| 2.2 Does your community meet the 40R/40Y District Best Practice? | YES/NO |
| 2.2.a Upload proof 40R/40Y District | |
| 2.2.b Narrative about 40R/40Y District | |
| 2.3 Does your community meet the Transit-Oriented Development Best Practice? | YES/NO |
| 2.3.a Upload proof of Transit-Oriented Development | |
| 2.3.b Narrative about Transit-Oriented Development | |
| 2.4 Does your community meet the Housing Rehab Funding Best Practice? | YES/NO |
| 2.4.a Upload proof of Housing Rehab Funding | |
| 2.4.b Narrative about Housing Rehab Funding | |
| 2.5 Does your community meet the Local Rehab Collaboration Best Practice? | YES/NO |
| 2.5.a Upload proof of Local Rehab Collaboration | |
| 2.5.b Narrative about Local Rehab Collaboration | |
| 2.6 Does your community meet the 40B Approval Best Practice? | YES/NO |
| 2.6.a Upload proof of 40B Approval | |
| 2.6.b Narrative about 40B Approval | |

| Question | Entry |
|--|--------------|
| 2.7 Does your community meet the Subsidized Housing Inventory (SHI) Best Practice? | YES/NO |
| 2.7.a Upload proof of Subsidized Housing Inventory (SHI) | |
| 2.7.b Narrative about Subsidized Housing Inventory (SHI) | |
| 2.8 Does your community meet the Local Actions that Support Housing Best Practice? | YES/NO |
| 2.8.a Upload proof of Local Actions that Support Housing | |
| 2.8.b Narrative about Local Actions that Support Housing | |

Other Best Practices

Reference the eligibility criteria above to determine how many total best practices your City/Town must meet to qualify for Designation.

Table 5: HCC Designation Application Section 2 Sample

| Question | Entry |
|---|--------------|
| 2.9 Does your community meet the Multi-Family Zoning Best Practice? | YES/NO |
| 2.9.a Upload proof of Multi-Family Zoning | |
| 2.9.b Narrative about Multi-Family Zoning | |
| 2.10 Does your community meet the City/Town-Wide Multi-Family Zoning Best Practice? | YES/NO |
| 2.10.a Upload proof of City/Town-Wide Multi-Family Zoning | |
| 2.10.b Narrative about City/Town-Wide Multi-Family Zoning | |
| 2.11 Does your community meet the Mixed-Use Zoning Best Practice? | YES/NO |
| 2.11.a Upload proof of Mixed-Use Zoning | |
| 2.11.b Narrative about Mixed-Use Zoning | |
| 2.12 Does your community meet the Cluster Development Best Practice? | YES/NO |
| 2.12.a Upload proof of Cluster Development | |
| 2.12.b Narrative about Cluster Development | |
| 2.13 Does your community meet the Accessory Dwelling Units (ADU) Best Practice? | YES/NO |
| 2.13.a Upload proof of ADU(s) | |
| 2.14.b Narrative about ADU(s) | |

| Question | Entry |
|--|--------------|
| 2.14 Does your community meet the Zoning Incentives Best Practice? | YES/NO |
| 2.14.a Upload proof of Zoning Incentives | |
| 2.14.b Narrative about Zoning Incentives | |
| 2.15 Does your community meet Resilient Buildings Best Practice? | YES/NO |
| 2.15.a Upload proof of Resilient Buildings | |
| 2.15.b Narrative about Resilient Buildings | |
| 2.16 Does your community meet the Climate Resiliency Planning Best Practice? | YES/NO |
| 2.16.a Upload proof of Climate Resiliency Planning | |
| 2.16.b Narrative about Climate Resiliency Planning | |
| 2.17 Does your community meet the State-Led Housing Program Participation Best Practice? | YES/NO |
| 2.17.a Upload proof of State-Led Housing Program Participation | |
| 2.17.b Narrative about State-Led Housing Program Participation | |
| 2.18 Does your community meet the Housing Production Plan (HPP) Best Practice? | YES/NO |
| 2.18.a Upload proof of Housing Production Plan (HPP) | |
| 2.18.b Narrative about Housing Production Plan (HPP) | |
| 2.19 Does your community meet the Housing Plan Implementation Best Practice? | YES/NO |
| 2.19.a Upload proof of Housing Plan Implementation | |
| 2.19.b Narrative about Housing Plan Implementation | |
| 2.20 Does your community meet the Land Use Board Training Best Practice? | YES/NO |
| 2.20.a Upload proof of Land Use Board Training | |
| 2.20.b Narrative about Land Use Board Training | |
| 2.21 Does your community meet the Regional Collaboration Best Practice? | YES/NO |
| 2.21.a Upload proof of Regional Collaboration | |
| 2.21.b Narrative about Regional Collaboration | |

Section 3: Certification and Signatures

The Housing Choice Community Designation application requires attestation that the person submitting the application has authority to do so and that the information provided is true and accurate.

Table 6: HCC Designation Application Section 3 Sample

| Question | Entry |
|---|--|
| 3.1.1 Local Building Official Name: (First) | |
| 3.1.1 Local Building Official Name: (Last) | |
| 3.1.2 Local Building Official Title: | |
| 3.1.3 Local Building Official Email: | |
| 3.1.4 Application Submission Attestation To submit the Designation application, read the following and check the attestation as appropriate. | <input type="checkbox"/> I attest the information provided in this Designation application is accurate, and that I have permission to submit the application on behalf of the City/Town. I attest the named Local Building Official has confirmed the permit data is correct to the best of their knowledge. I attest the City/Town CEO has approved submission of this application. |

RST-HCC Designation Criteria and Best Practices

To be considered for the RST-HCC Designation, a Town must meet one of the four Eligibility Criteria below. Evidence related to each criterion must be in the form of building and/or foundation permits and best practices documentation, as applicable, over the last 5 calendar years (2021-2025).

RST-HCC Eligibility Criteria

- 7% growth **OR** 700 new units (no best practices)
- 5% growth **OR** 500 new units, **PLUS** 4 of 21 best practices (at least 1 from Affordable category)
- 3% growth **OR** 300 new units, **PLUS** 7 of 21 best practices (at least 2 from Affordable category)
- 1.5% growth **OR** 150 new units, **PLUS** 9 of 21 best practices (at least 3 from Affordable category)

Additional Eligibility Conditions and Evidence

- ✓ Rural and Small Towns⁴ defined as municipalities with a year-round population of 7,000 or less **OR** less than 500 people per square mile are eligible and may only apply for RST-HCC Designation consideration.
- ✓ MBTA Communities determined to be noncompliant with the MBTA Communities Law (M.G.L. c.40A s.3A) and regulations (760 CMR 72.00) are ineligible for the Designation.
- ✓ Permitting evidence may be submitted in the form of U.S. Census Building Permit Survey (BPS) data and/or data directly from a municipality's own issued permits.
- ✓ Permitting evidence must be in the form of building permits and/or foundation permits and does not include occupancy permits or other approvals made before a building permit is issued.

2026 New Units Count Pilot

Homes that have been rehabilitated to improve their livability in the past 5 years can count as a "net new unit" for the purposes of the Designation application after either:

- D.** having been cited for building or sanitary code violations **OR**
- E.** were subject to cancellation of commercial property insurance due to substandard property conditions **OR**
- F.** were otherwise blighted⁵ or substandard⁶

⁴ Find the list of the 181 Rural and Small Towns that meet this definition at <https://www.mass.gov/doc/rural-and-small-town-designation-list-2024/download>

⁵ "Blighted" means the home's condition is detrimental to safety, health, or welfare because the home is out of repair, physically deteriorated, unfit for human habitation, or obsolete.

⁶ "Substandard" means conditions that, by reason of dilapidation, overcrowding, faulty arrangement or design, lack of ventilation, light, and/or sanitation facilities, are detrimental to safety, health, or welfare.

2026 RST-HCC Best Practices

The tables below list all 21 Best Practices (BP) by category, describe each BP, and show the possible number of possible BPs that each may count toward the eligibility criteria.

Table 7: RST-HCC Affordable Best Practices

| # | Affordable Best Practices | Possible BP Count |
|----|--|-------------------|
| 1. | <p>Inclusionary Zoning: Have Inclusionary Zoning (IZ) with density bonuses that provides for reasonable density increases so that housing is not unreasonably precluded.</p> <p><i>This BP will count as two for Rural and Small Towns with IZ policies that meet this standard.</i></p> | 1 or 2 BPs |
| 2. | <p>40R/40Y District: Have an approved 40R Smart Growth or 40Y Starter Home district that remains in compliance with the program.</p> <p><i>This BP will count as two for communities that have permitted units in their approved district(s) in the last 5 years.</i></p> | 1 or 2 BPs |
| 3. | <p>Transit-Oriented Development: Have created new districts, changed zoning, or dedicated local resources to incentivize transit-oriented development or made local investments to create/improve public transit or multi-modal options connecting housing to other areas, such as, but not limited to, multi-use paths/trails, pedestrian infrastructure, or micro-transit options (such as, but not limited to, Council on Aging or other like-transit options) in the last 5 years.</p> | 1 BP |
| 4. | <p>Housing Rehab Funding: Have designated local resources to rehab vacant and dilapidated properties in the last 5 years, such as but not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Established a local housing rehab program Spent local funds on housing rehab (such as, but not limited to, CPA/CDBG/HOME funds) Dedicated municipal staff to promote and provide technical assistance to housing rehab Worked with a regional entity to increase capacity to implement local rehabilitation programs | 1 BP |
| 5. | <p>Local Rehab Collaboration: Demonstrated at least two of the following in the last 5 years:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Municipal staff participation in Housing Rehab Training Promoted home efficiency or rehab programs, such as Mass Save, the Neighborhood HUB, Habitat for Humanity, or other statewide housing rehabilitation programs Worked with local organizations and home builders to complete rehabilitation projects | 1 BP |

| # | Affordable Best Practices | Possible BP Count |
|----|---|-------------------|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Other local actions to collaborate with other communities, regional entities, or other collaborative efforts that promote housing rehab | |
| 6. | Affordable Housing Approval: Have a demonstrated pattern of approving housing projects that include deed restricted, affordable, units in the last 5 years. | 1 BP |
| 7. | <p>Subsidized Housing Inventory: Demonstrate at least one of the following related to Subsidized Housing Inventory (SHI):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> SHI units that equal or exceed 10% of total year-round housing stock according to HLC's SHI Increased SHI units by at least 1.5% in the last 5 years <p><i>This BP will count as two for communities that meet both.</i></p> | 1 or 2 BPs |
| 8. | <p>Local Actions that Support Housing: Demonstrate at least three of the following local actions for housing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Currently have an Affordable Housing Trust (AHT) or Community Preservation Act (CPA) Committee Have an AHT with an active local funding program Allocated over 10% CPA funds for housing projects in the last 5 years Re-use or redevelopment of local donated or surplus land for housing in the last 5 years Collaboration with state agencies to promote the redevelopment of state surplus land into housing that resulted in successful RFP/Auction in the last 5 years Adopted local option property tax relief programs for income-eligible seniors as provided for by statute (MGL c. 59 section 5) or through a home rule petition Adopted a Community Impact Fee for short-term rentals (MGL c. 64G, section 3D) that is committed in writing to use a portion of such revenues for affordable housing Implemented policies or initiatives to promote missing middle housing in the last 5 years Implemented other locally identified creative pro housing strategies not listed here in the last 5 years | 1 BP |

Table 8: RST-HCC Other Best Practices

| # | Other Best Practices | Possible BP Count |
|-----|---|-------------------|
| 9. | <p>Multi-Family Zoning: Have at least one multi-family zoning district or form-based zoning that allows for multi-family housing (allowing 2 units or more, not including ADUs) as of right (in addition to any 40R or 3A district/s) that does not restrict development by age of occupant or number of bedrooms.</p> <p><i>This BP will count as two for Rural and Small Towns that meet this standard.</i></p> | 2 BPs |
| 10. | <p>City/Town-Wide Multi-Family Zoning: Have city- or town-wide multi-family zoning (allowing 2 units or more, not including ADUs) as of right.</p> <p><i>This BP will count as two for Rural and Small Towns that meet this standard.</i></p> | 2 BPs |
| 11. | <p>Mixed-Use Zoning: Have at least one zoning district that allows residential/mixed-use development as of right (which is not part of a 40R district), such as but not limited to a downtown, village center, or like district.</p> | 1 BP |
| 12. | <p>Cluster Development: Have at least one zoning district that allows Cluster or Open Space Residential Development (OSRD).</p> | 1 BP |
| 13. | <p>Accessory Dwelling Units (ADU): Have adopted or amended local zoning bylaws since the implementation date (2/2/2025) of MGL c. 40A s. 1A and s. 3 and 760 CMR 71.000, the state's ADU law and regulations.</p> | 1 BP |
| 14. | <p>Zoning Incentives: Have implemented at least one of the following pro-housing policies that remove zoning barriers to produce housing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not require more than one parking space per unit for multi-family units • Reduced minimum lot sizes and set-back rules • Allow for greater building height and density • Allow for an as-of-right Flood Plan review • Do not prohibit the construction of manufactured homes • Other local zoning changes that remove barriers to permit and promote new homes <p><i>This BP will count as two for Rural and Small Towns that implement two or more.</i></p> | 1 or 2 BPs |

| # | Other Best Practices | Possible BP Count |
|-----|---|-------------------|
| 15. | Resilient Buildings: Have development standards or programs that incentivize decarbonization, including energy efficiency for new construction and/or rehabilitation, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low-impact development (LID) practices • Stretch Code • Renewable energy integration • Participation in the Energy Star program | 1 BP |
| 16. | Climate Resiliency Planning: Have created or updated a climate resiliency plan in the last 5 years that includes a vulnerability assessment, adaptation strategies, mitigation actions, governance and coordination strategies, and monitoring and evaluation processes. | 1 BP |
| 17. | State-Led Housing Program Participation: Participation in at least one of the following in the last 5 years: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing Development Incentive Program (HDIP) • Have an Urban Center Housing Tax Increment Financing (UCH-TIF) district • Adopted or updated an Urban Renewal Plan that includes a significant housing production element • Other HLC, Mass Housing Partnership (MHP), MassHousing, MassDevelopment, or CEDAC-led program or initiative that focuses on housing production, ending homelessness, or improving community livability <p><i>This BP will count as two for Rural and Small Towns that participate in two or more.</i></p> | 1 or 2 BPs |
| 18. | Housing Production Plan: Have an HLC-approved or -certified Housing Production Plan (HPP) at the time of designation application. <p><i>This BP will count as two for certified HPPs.</i></p> | 1 or 2 BPs |
| 19. | Housing Plan Implementation: Implemented at least three strategies identified in an HLC-approved HPP. (The 3 strategies must be different than the BPs listed here.) | 1 BP |

| # | Other Best Practices | Possible BP Count |
|-----|---|-------------------|
| 20. | <p>Land Use Board Training: Provided education and training in the last 5 years for land use board members (Planning Board, Board of Appeals, Select Board, and/or City Council) from:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Citizen Planner Training Collaborative (CPTC) • Massachusetts Housing Partnership's (MHP) Housing Institute • Citizens' Housing and Planning Association's (CHAPA) Housing Summit or Massachusetts Housing Leadership Academy • Community Development Partnership's Lower Cape Housing Institute • Urban Land Institute's (ULI) Urban Plan Public Leadership Institute • Southern New England American Planning Association (SNEAPA) • Regional Planning Agencies (RPA) | 1 BP |
| 21. | <p>Regional Collaboration: Participated in a regional planning effort with other Cities and Towns or collaborated with neighboring Cities and Towns to tackle regional matters related to housing in the last 5 years. Note that working with your RPA to conduct a municipal-specific plan does not count for this best practice.</p> | 1 BP |

2026 RST-HCC Designation Application Sample

Please note this is a sample to assist you in preparation to submit an [RST-HCC Designation Application](#). This sample should not be submitted as an attachment as part of your application or submitted to HLC via email instead of a complete online application. Submission of this sample will not be considered a complete designation application.

Welcome to the 2026 Rural and Small Town Housing Choice Community (RST-HCC) Designation application. If your City/Town is NOT [designated as Rural and/or Small Town](#), please complete the [2026 Housing Choice Community \(HCC\) Designation application](#).

Section 1: Information About Your City/Town

In this section, provide information about your City/Town, including contact information, eligibility criteria, and count of year-round housing units.

Table 9: RST-HCC Designation Application Section 1 Sample

| Question | Entry |
|---|---|
| 1.1 City/Town | |
| 1.2 Application Point of Contact (First) | |
| 1.2 Application Point of Contact (Last) | |
| 1.3 Point of Contact Email | |
| 1.4 City/Town Legal Address (Street Address) | |
| 1.4 City/Town Legal Address (Address Line 2) | |
| 1.4 City/Town Legal Address (City) | |
| 1.4 City/Town Legal Address (ZIP / Postal Code) | |
| 1.5 First-time or Renewal Designation Application? | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Applying for first-time designation• Applying to renew designation expiring in 2026• Applying to renew designation that expired before 2026 |
| 1.6 Is your City/Town an MBTA Community that has been determined to be noncompliant with M.G.L. c.40A Section 3A of the Zoning Act (the MBTA Communities Act) and its regulations (760 CMR 72.00)? Note: Noncompliant MBTA Communities are not eligible for Designation. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• NO: City/Town has received a District Compliance Determination letter and is compliant.• NO: City/Town is in conditional compliance.• NO: City/Town is in interim compliance.• YES: City/Town is non-compliant.• N/A: City/Town is not an MBTA Community. |
| 1.7 Does your City/Town have any active housing restrictions or restrictive bylaws, such as | YES/NO |

| Question | Entry |
|--|-----------------|
| phased growth zoning, sewer moratorium, or housing moratorium? If yes, you must provide a copy of the ordinance(s) and/or bylaw(s) that established the restriction. | |
| 1.7.a. Housing Restriction Upload | |
| 1.7.b. Provide a brief narrative/description of your City/Town's housing restriction/restrictive bylaw. | |
| 1.8 Has your City/Town conducted an ADA Self-Evaluation and Transition Plan? If no, your City/Town must enter into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with HLC and the Massachusetts Office on Disability (MOD) to conduct such plan within 5 years to be eligible for Designation. Completing an ADA MOU is a condition of the Designation. | YES/NO/NOT SURE |

Housing Units Information

STOP: Please make sure you have the following information before you continue the application.

- Year-Round Housing Units:** [Find your City/Town's total 2020 year-round housing units](#) from the 2020 Census as provided by HLC.
- New Units:** Compile your City/Town's **total net increase in year-round housing units** from January 1, 2021, through December 31, 2025. You must use local data for calendar year 2025. For calendar years 2021 - 2024, you may use either **A)** US Census Building Permit Survey (BPS) data **and/or B)** your local building permit data/records to document net new housing units in your community. Foundation permits may also count towards your City/Town's total of new units.
- 2026 New Units Count Pilot:** Homes that have been rehabilitated to improve their livability in the past 5 years may count as a net "new unit" for purposes of Designation application after either: **A)** having been cited for building or sanitary code violations, **OR B)** were subject to cancellation of commercial property insurance due to substandard property conditions, **OR C)** were otherwise blighted or substandard.

Table 10: RST-HCC Designation Application Section 1 Sample

| Question | Entry |
|---|-------|
| 1.9 What is your City/Town's 2020 Census count of year-round housing units? | |

| Question | Entry |
|---|--|
| 2020 year-round housing units are available in the link above and for download at https://www.mass.gov/how-to/apply-for-the-housing-choice-designation . | |
| 1.10 What is the number of New Units permitted PER CALENDAR YEAR between 2021 and 2025? If Building Permit Survey (BPS) data for any years between 2021 and 2024 are accurate, you may insert those BPS numbers. If BPS data is incorrect, you may insert local data. You must provide local data for 2025 (as published BPS data for 2025 is not yet available). See the above description of qualifying New Units, including the 2026 New Units Count Pilot. | 2021: 2022: 2023: 2024: |
| 1.11 What is the total of New Units permitted between January 1, 2021, and December 31, 2025? | |
| 1.12 Calculated percent increase in year-round housing units (net new units/2020 Census count of year-round units*100): | |
| 1.13 Select the eligibility criteria your City/Town is applying under: | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 7% growth OR 700 new units (no best practices) • 5% growth OR 500 new units, PLUS 4 of 21 best practices (at least 1 from Affordable category) • 3% growth OR 300 new units, PLUS 7 of 21 best practices (at least 2 from Affordable category) • 1.5% growth OR 150 new units, PLUS 9 of 21 best practices (at least 3 from Affordable category) |
| 1.14 For evidence of new units between 2021 and 2024, are you using any BPS data? | <input type="checkbox"/> 2021 <input type="checkbox"/> 2022 <input type="checkbox"/> 2023 <input type="checkbox"/> 2024 |
| 1.14.b Upload Local Building Permit Data | |

Section 2: Housing Choice Best Practices

Please review the Best Practices below. If your community meets a best practice, select "yes," upload evidence/documentation as proof, and briefly describe how your community meets the best practice.

NOTE: If your City/Town is applying under the eligibility criteria of 7% or 700 new units, you must select and provide proof of best practices your City/Town meets. While proof of best practices is not required under this eligibility criteria, you must provide best practices and proofs to submit a complete application and be considered for Designation.

Affordable Best Practices

Reference the eligibility criteria above to determine how many affordable best practices your City/Town must meet to qualify for Designation.

Table 11: RST-HCC Designation Application Section 2 Sample

| Question | Entry |
|--|--------------|
| 2.1 Does your community meet the Inclusionary Zoning Best Practice? | YES/NO |
| 2.1.a Upload proof of Inclusionary Zoning | |
| 2.1.b Narrative about Inclusionary Zoning | |
| 2.2 Does your community meet the 40R/40Y District Best Practice? | YES/NO |
| 2.2.a Upload proof 40R/40Y District | |
| 2.2.b Narrative about 40R/40Y District | |
| 2.3 Does your community meet the Transit-Oriented Development Best Practice? | YES/NO |
| 2.3.a Upload proof of Transit-Oriented Development | |
| 2.3.b Narrative about Transit-Oriented Development | |
| 2.4 Does your community meet the Housing Rehab Funding Best Practice? | YES/NO |
| 2.4.a Upload proof of Housing Rehab Funding | |
| 2.4.b Narrative about Housing Rehab Funding | |
| 2.5 Does your community meet the Local Rehab Collaboration Best Practice? | YES/NO |
| 2.5.a Upload proof of Local Rehab Collaboration | |
| 2.5.b Narrative about Local Rehab Collaboration | |
| 2.6 Does your community meet the Affordable Housing Best Practice? | YES/NO |
| 2.6.a Upload proof of Affordable Housing Approval | |
| 2.6.b Narrative about Affordable Housing Approval | |
| 2.7 Does your community meet the Subsidized Housing Inventory (SHI) Best Practice? | YES/NO |
| 2.7.a Upload proof of Subsidized Housing Inventory (SHI) | |

| Question | Entry |
|--|--------|
| 2.7.b Narrative about Subsidized Housing Inventory (SHI) | |
| 2.8 Does your community meet the Local Actions that Support Housing Best Practice? | YES/NO |
| 2.8.a Upload proof of Local Actions that Support Housing | |
| 2.8.b Narrative about Local Actions that Support Housing | |

Other Best Practices

Reference the eligibility criteria above to determine how many total best practices your City/Town must meet to qualify for Designation.

Table 12: RST-HCC Designation Application Section 2 Sample

| Question | Entry |
|---|--------|
| 2.9 Does your community meet the Multi-Family Zoning Best Practice? | YES/NO |
| 2.9.a Upload proof of Multi-Family Zoning | |
| 2.9.b Narrative about Multi-Family Zoning | |
| 2.10 Does your community meet the City/Town-Wide Multi-Family Zoning Best Practice? | YES/NO |
| 2.10.a Upload proof of City/Town-Wide Multi-Family Zoning | |
| 2.10.b Narrative about City/Town-Wide Multi-Family Zoning | |
| 2.11 Does your community meet the Mixed-Use Zoning Best Practice? | YES/NO |
| 2.11.a Upload proof of Mixed-Use Zoning | |
| 2.11.b Narrative about Mixed-Use Zoning | |
| 2.12 Does your community meet the Cluster Development Best Practice? | YES/NO |
| 2.12.a Upload proof of Cluster Development | |
| 2.12.b Narrative about Cluster Development | |
| 2.13 Does your community meet the Accessory Dwelling Units (ADU) Best Practice? | YES/NO |
| 2.13.a Upload proof of ADU(s) | |
| 2.14.b Narrative about ADU(s) | |
| 2.14 Does your community meet the Zoning Incentives Best Practice? | YES/NO |
| 2.14.a Upload proof of Zoning Incentives | |
| 2.14.b Narrative about Zoning Incentives | |

| Question | Entry |
|--|--------------|
| 2.15 Does your community meet Resilient Buildings Best Practice? | YES/NO |
| 2.15.a Upload proof of Resilient Buildings | |
| 2.15.b Narrative about Resilient Buildings | |
| 2.16 Does your community meet the Climate Resiliency Planning Best Practice? | YES/NO |
| 2.16.a Upload proof of Climate Resiliency Planning | |
| 2.16.b Narrative about Climate Resiliency Planning | |
| 2.17 Does your community meet the State-Led Housing Program Participation Best Practice? | YES/NO |
| 2.17.a Upload proof of State-Led Housing Program Participation | |
| 2.17.b Narrative about State-Led Housing Program Participation | |
| 2.18 Does your community meet the Housing Production Plan (HPP) Best Practice? | YES/NO |
| 2.18.a Upload proof of Housing Production Plan (HPP) | |
| 2.18.b Narrative about Housing Production Plan (HPP) | |
| 2.19 Does your community meet the Housing Plan Implementation Best Practice? | YES/NO |
| 2.19.a Upload proof of Housing Plan Implementation | |
| 2.19.b Narrative about Housing Plan Implementation | |
| 2.20 Does your community meet the Land Use Board Training Best Practice? | YES/NO |
| 2.20.a Upload proof of Land Use Board Training | |
| 2.20.b Narrative about Land Use Board Training | |
| 2.21 Does your community meet the Regional Collaboration Best Practice? | YES/NO |
| 2.21.a Upload proof of Regional Collaboration | |
| 2.21.b Narrative about Regional Collaboration | |

Section 3: Certification and Signatures

The Rural and Small Town Housing Choice Community Designation application requires attestation that the person submitting the application has authority to do so and that the information provided is true and accurate.

Table 13: RST-HCC Designation Application Section 3 Sample

| Question | Entry |
|--|---|
| 3.1.1 Local Building Official Name: (First) | |
| 3.1.1 Local Building Official Name: (Last) | |
| 3.1.2 Local Building Official Title: | |
| 3.1.3 Local Building Official Email: | |
| <p>3.1.4 Application Submission Attestation</p> <p>To submit the Designation application, read the following and check the attestation as appropriate.</p> | <p><input type="checkbox"/> I attest the information provided in this Designation application is accurate, and that I have permission to submit the application on behalf of the City/Town. I attest the named Local Building Official has confirmed the permit data is correct to the best of their knowledge. I attest the City/Town CEO has approved submission of this application.</p> |