



# Housing Choice Grant Program

## Program Information and Guidelines FY2025

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## **Housing Choice Grant Program FY2025**

### **Introduction**

The Housing Choice Initiative provides incentives, rewards, technical assistance, and targeted legislative reform to encourage and empower municipalities to plan and build the diverse housing stock that the Commonwealth needs to continue to thrive. The Housing Choice Grant Program rewards municipalities that have produced a significant number of housing units in the last five years and that have adopted or established Best Practices that encourage housing production. Grant funds may be used for a variety of activities related to planning and zoning, site preparation for development, housing development, and infrastructure.

### **Maximum Award**

Housing Choice grants provide up to \$500,000 in funding for projects that fall under the “Site Preparation,” “Buildings,” and “Infrastructure” One Stop development continuum categories. Funding over this limit will only be considered for joint or regional applications on a case-by-case basis, at EOHLC’s discretion, based on:

- project need,
- outcomes,
- impact, and
- scope of engagement plan and implementation.

Projects that fall under the “Planning and Zoning” One Stop development continuum category are limited to no more than \$150,000 in funding for single entities. Applicants are encouraged to conduct due diligence to determine accurate estimates of project costs to better understand actual costs of the proposed project. Funding over this limit will be considered on a case-by-case basis, at EOHLC’s discretion, based on exceptional proof of:

- project need,
- outcomes,
- impact, and
- scope of engagement plan and implementation.

While a local cash match is not required, projects that include at least a 10% cash match will receive bonus points. Please note that staff time is not considered a “cash match”. EOHLC reserves the right to reduce the amount of the award from the original request, and to deny an award to applicants with existing or past violations of EOHLC contractual obligations. Funding availability is subject to the final state budget.

## Project Examples

Examples of eligible projects include, but are not limited to:

### Planning and Zoning

1. Planning for housing at specific parcel(s) including feasibility analysis, master plans, site plans, market assessments, and other parcel(s) specific planning projects.
2. Creation of a multi-family zoning district near a transit station to comply with M.G.L. Chapter 40A, Section 3A.
3. Review of current zoning to identify and remove language that excludes certain housing types.
4. Review of zoning ordinances, creation of a plan to update zoning rules to unlock potential housing production, and implementation of strategies defined in a Housing Production Plan or other municipal plan.

### Site Preparation

1. Permitting and preparing engineering plans to address changes to existing water, sewer, and stormwater in a development site.
2. Conducting pre-development site master plan on an underutilized commercial property with the intent to create mixed use that includes affordable housing.
3. Demolishing a blighted building that cannot be recovered to prepare a portion of a parcel or an entire parcel for mixed-use redevelopment that includes affordable housing.

### Buildings

1. Providing further subsidies to an affordable housing project to directly create affordable housing units or increase the number of affordable units in a new housing project.
2. Rehabilitation of housing to bring an underutilized property back onto the market.

### Infrastructure

1. Permitting and construction of existing water, sewer, and stormwater.
2. Creation of engineering designs to replace an existing sewer pump station and increase water capacity to build additional housing.
3. Improvements to an intersection near newly built or permitted mixed-use project that will yield new affordable housing.
4. Physical infrastructure improvements to increase safety, mobility, accessibility, and quality of life between residential and commercial areas that increases and promotes alternative modes of transportation.

Program Information and these Guidelines have been developed for Housing Choice Grant Program applicants. EOHLC may issue additional guidance, clarification, or revisions which shall be incorporated by reference into these Guidelines. This document is intended to clarify, interpret, and explain existing program requirements, and to provide guidance on EOHLC's applicant selection process. It is not intended to be exhaustive.

## Eligible Applicants

Currently designated Housing Choice Communities, Regional Planning Agencies, and related municipal entities (Public Housing Authority, Redevelopment Authority, Water/Sewer or Service District, Economic Development Industrial Corporation, bodies created by legislative act to serve a municipality) serving a currently designated Housing Choice Community are eligible for consideration of an FY25 Housing Choice grant. Applications may be submitted by:

- A single applicant,
- two or more eligible applicants in a joint application with one lead entity, and
- applications from a regional entity for projects in Housing Choice Communities only

**Applicants with adopted housing moratoria are ineligible for this grant.** If a community has other restrictive bylaws (such as growth limitations or infrastructure moratoria), these must allow for at least a 5% increase in housing units over a single year, and applicants with such bylaws will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis to determine eligibility at EOHLC's discretion. Contact [filipe.zamborlini@mass.gov](mailto:filipe.zamborlini@mass.gov) with questions about this eligibility factor.

Further eligibility criteria for the Housing Choice Grant Program are as follows:

- **Municipal applicants:**
  - \* **Municipality must be a [currently designated Housing Choice Community](#).**
  - \* Municipality must have conducted an ADA Self Evaluation or Transition Plan or is willing to commit to conduct such planning by signing a Memorandum of Understanding with EOHLC and Mass Office of Disability.
- **Regional Planning Agencies and Related Municipal Entities applicants:**
  - \* Related Municipal Entities must be within, serve, plan to serve, and/or continue to serve a currently Designated Housing Choice Community.
  - \* Applications submitted directly by a Regional Planning Agency or Related Municipal entity must provide clear and evident support for their project by the Housing Choice Community/Communities.

## Use of Funds

Funding is available through the "Planning and Zoning," "Site Preparation," "Buildings," and "Infrastructure" categories of the Community One Stop for Growth development continuum. Grants will fund a variety of activities related to community planning, zoning revisions (as defined in the FY25 Community Planning Grant Program Guidelines), feasibility, engineering, design, and construction of physical infrastructure and of existing and new buildings, rehabilitation, due diligence, plan designs, market studies, pre-permitting/permitting, engineering, acquisition, demolition, and site-related upgrades of future development sites. Construction projects should consider whether their budget should contain a contingency line item.

Grant funds shall not be used to support:

1. Any activities related to assertion of the General Land Area Minimum (GLAM) (1.5% of total land area) safe harbor under 760 CMR 56.03(b)(Chapter 40B); or
2. Routine administrative tasks of municipal staff including, but not limited to, grant application preparation, and other municipal staff time.

### Timeline of Use of Funds

FY25 grants are expected to be awarded in the fall of 2024 and funded projects **must be completed by June 30, 2026**.

### Special Considerations

- **Rural and Small Towns** (towns with populations less than 7,000 or density of less than 500 persons per square mile): At EOHLC's discretion, up to 15% of available Housing Choice Grant Program funds will be set aside for Rural and Small Towns that are currently designated as Housing Choice Communities, depending on the number of applications received and competitiveness of the grant cycle.
- **Gateway Cities:** At EOHCL's discretion, up to 15% of available Housing Choice Grant Program funds will be set aside for Gateway Cities currently designated as Housing Choice Communities, depending on the number of applications received and competitiveness of the grant cycle.

### Community One Stop for Growth Application

The Housing Choice Grant Program is part of the [Community One Stop for Growth](#), a single application portal and collaborative review process of community and economic development grant programs that make targeted investments based on a Development Continuum. It is designed to allow applicants to apply for consideration of multiple sources of funding to support multiple phases and facets of a project. For more information, including key dates, frequently asked questions, and instructions on submitting an Expression of Interest and Full Application, please visit [www.mass.gov/onestop](http://www.mass.gov/onestop).

The One Stop Full Application is organized into the following sections:

- Form 1 – Applicant Information
- Form 2 – Project Information
- Form 3 – Certification of Application Submission Authority

In order to be considered for Housing Choice Grant Program funding, applicants must include complete responses to all required questions.

### Additional Information

- For information on the One Stop, including key dates, frequently asked questions, and instructions on submitting an Expression of Interest and Full Application, please visit [www.mass.gov/onestop](http://www.mass.gov/onestop).
- The Expression of Interest is an optional, but highly recommended form that allows an applicant to seek guidance from the One Stop partner agencies. Applicants are encouraged to submit an Expression of Interest prior to starting their Full Application(s). Visit the [One Stop Expression of Interest webpage](#) for more information and access to the Expression of Interest form.
- All applications must be submitted electronically. The online application portal, IGX, can be accessed at <https://eohed.intelligrants.com>. An online webinar outlining the use of the system will be available on the site. The application form template and link to the portal will also be available on the [One Stop webpage](#).
- Eligible applicants may submit funding requests for more than one Planning and Zoning, Site Preparation, Buildings, and Infrastructure project in the same round. However, a separate application is required for each project. Each proposal will be evaluated independently against the criteria and will be competing directly with all other proposals.
- It is the responsibility of the applicant to be aware of all requirements and deadlines, and to ensure that their application is complete and submitted on time. All applications will be logged as to date and time received and kept on file as public record. Late submissions will not be considered.

EOHLC reserves the right to request additional information from the applicant or external sources as may be necessary in order to complete the application review. EOHLC also reserves the right to recommend partial grant awards, as deemed appropriate

### Housing Choice Evaluation Criteria

Applications will be scored for the responsiveness to the following criteria. See [Appendix 1](#) for full Evaluation Criteria and Scoring:

- **Project Need:** What community needs are met by the project? Evaluation will consider factors such as impact on housing development, preservation, and/or rehabilitation; impact on other municipally identified needs; and advancing opportunities for target populations.
- **Project Readiness:** Is the project reasonable and achievable within proposed timeline? Evaluation will consider factors such as feasible timeline and scope; identified leadership with experience and ability to execute the project; implementation readiness; and inclusion of a comprehensive public engagement plan.
- **Project Financial Feasibility:** Is the project's budget reasonable? Evaluation will consider factors such as whether project is fully or partially funded; reasonableness of cost estimate; and inclusion of cash match(es). In-kind contributions are not match eligible.

- **Progress & Commitment to Date:** Does the applicant show commitment to the project through past activity and investment? Evaluation will consider factors such as progress to date; prior state/federal funding; and leadership involvement to date.
- **Project Outcomes & Impact:** What are the projected outcomes of this project and the impact this project may have on the community? Evaluation will consider factors such as impact of the project relative to the community and responsiveness to identified need; tangible outcomes; community engagement plan; zoning or local by-law changes related to the project; and implementation strategies.
- **Housing Choice Best Practices:** How many are Housing Choice Best Practices are implemented by the Housing Choice Community? Evaluation will consider how many Best Practices related to zoning, housing, and affordable housing are implemented.

### **Grant Award Process**

#### **Contract with EOHLC and Award of Funds:**

Successful applicants must be ready to enter into a contract with EOHLC within 30 days after receiving contract documents. Funding is subject to approval of the EOHLC operating and capital budgets. Grant projects may begin as of the execution of the contract. If selected, the grantee will be required to submit the following forms to complete a contract:

- Commonwealth Standard Contract Form, filled out and signed by the Respondent.
- Commonwealth Scope and Budget Form (available from EOHLC).
- Completed Contractor Authorized Signature Verification Form.

#### **Grant Distribution and Invoicing:**

Granted funds will be disbursed on a reimbursement basis. Only work completed during the period of the executed contract will be eligible for reimbursement. Upon receipt of all required deliverables the community will be reimbursed for the balance of any outstanding grant funds.

## **APPENDIX 1: HOUSING CHOICE EVALUATION CRITERIA AND SCORING**

Applications to the Housing Choice grant program will be eligible to receive a **maximum of 122 points** through a panel review process.

### Housing Choice Scoring Criteria (maximum 122 points)

#### **Project Need (maximum 31 points):**

Project Need will be scored based on demonstration of one or more of the following:

##### Overall Project Need (Project will receive one of the following scores below)

- Project responds to recent 40A reforms (MBTA Communities or simple majority zoning votes) and/or advances housing development, preservation, and/or rehabilitation. **(18 points)**
- Project responds to other municipally identified and documented need supporting a more livable community, economic development, or local transportation options. **(12 points)**
- Project responds to other municipally identified need(s) and lacks documented evidence of support. **(9 points)**

##### Priority Project Need (Projects that meet the following criteria will receive bonus points)

- **BONUS:** The community does not have a full-time planner or project related full-time municipal staff assistance that addresses municipal staffing capacity to complete this project and unlock further housing or economic development potential. **(4 points)**
- **BONUS:** Project will advance opportunities for community members who have been socially and economically disadvantaged, and/or historically underrepresented. **(3 points)**
- **BONUS:** Project is located within an Environmental Justice census block group. **(3 points)**
- **BONUS:** Project is the result of a partnership between two or more municipalities or eligible entities through a joint or regional application. **(3 points)**

#### **Project Implementation (maximum total 15 points):**

Readiness will be scored based on demonstration of the following:

##### Overall Project Readiness (Project will receive one of the following scores per criteria below)

- **Scope and Timeline:**
  - Project scope and timeline are feasible and within the grant timeline. Project has identified a consultant and/or has a sample cost estimate. **(5 points)**
  - Project scope and timeline may be feasible within the grant timeline, but project does not have a sample cost estimate or an identified consultant. Project is ready to release an RFP within 3 months of award. **(3 points)**
  - Project may not be achievable within proposed timeline and/or project is not ready to bid upon within 3 months of award. **(0 points)**
- **Ability to Execute:**



- Project leadership has requisite experience and ability to execute the project and is likely to be effectively managed. **(5 points)**
- Project leadership has some experience to lead the project but may face some challenges executing project. **(3 points)**
- Project leadership has little to no experience leading a similar project. **(0 points)**
- **Community Engagement (for planning and zoning projects only):**
  - Project includes a comprehensive public engagement plan that includes all the following: has an inclusive participation process, engages new voices, empowers diverse stakeholders, and has identified a feasible path toward implementation. **(5 points)**
  - Project includes a public engagement plan that has at least one but not all of the following: has an inclusive participation process, engages new voices, empowers diverse stakeholders, and has identified a feasible path toward implementation. **(3 points)**
  - Project includes a limited public engagement plan and/or does not have a feasible path toward implementation. **(0 points)**
- **Construction readiness (for site readiness/building/infrastructure projects only):**
  - Project is ready to bid and execute contract within 3 months of award for feasibility, design and/or engineering, or construction services by an identified contractor, or is ready to start within 3 months of contracting or in the most immediate construction season for construction. **(5 points)**
  - Project can start within 3 months of award using established purchasing consortia, municipal material and equipment bid results or other immediately available sources for capital items, and the project has complete design and/or specifications and will proceed to bid upon grant award. **(3 points)**
  - Project is not ready to commence as steps outside of the scope of this project are needed to be completed prior to start. **(0 points)**

**Project Financial Feasibility (maximum 12 points):**

Financial Feasibility will be scored based on demonstration of one or more of the following:

*Overall Project Financial Feasibility (Project will receive one of the following scores)*

- The grant request fully funds the project or fills the last funding gap in an otherwise fully funded project, and, as applicable, unlocks private/partner spending match. **(6 points)**
- The project request includes a draft warrant article or other recommended community funds request to pursue remaining funding with a funding award schedule that allows for project completion by grant deadline. **(4 points)**
- The project requests a portion of the funds necessary to complete the project and evidence of other grant applications and potential award schedule is provided. **(52 points)**
- The project requests more funding than the applicant is eligible for or requests more funding than is available to the entire grant program. **(0 points)**

*Priority Project Financial Feasibility (Projects that meet the following criteria will receive bonus points)*

- **BONUS:** The project includes at least a 10% local funding match. Note that only cash (including DLTA, ARPA, and other municipal appropriations) counts as a match, staff time does not count as a match. **(3 points)**
- **BONUS:** The project includes another match funding source. Note that only cash (including DLTA, ARPA, and other municipal/organizational appropriations) counts as a match; staff time does not count as a match. **(3 points)**

**Progress & Commitment to Date (maximum 15 points):**

Progress and Commitment to Date will be scored based on the following:

Priority Project Progress Commitment to Date (Projects that meet the following criteria will receive points)

- Project is the result of another previously identified plan or community-based initiative/project that accomplished a previously set community goal. **(6 Points)**
- Project has been previously supported by EOHLIC and follows up on ongoing commitment from other state/federal agencies and or grants. **(3 Points)**
- Project leadership has been involved in previous related project or in the lead up to this project. **(3 points)**
- Project is either a first-time tool used by the community or addresses a long known need that has not been addressed for a long period of time due to lack of resources. **(3 points)**

**Project Outcomes & Impact (maximum 27 points):**

Outcomes & Impact will be scored based on demonstration of one or more of the following:

Overall Project Outcomes & Impact (Project will receive one of the following scores)

- Project will result in zoning rules changes and opportunities for tangible outcomes that advance housing development, preservation, and/or rehabilitation, and clearly outlines how public engagement and/or implementation strategies will advance housing development, preservation, and/or rehabilitation, and clearly solves the identified project need. **(15 Points)**
- Project may result in recommendations or tactics/strategies/tools that may eventually advance housing development, preservation, and/or rehabilitation, but may face significant challenges due to implementation plans and feasibility and/or the anticipated outcomes and impact are not clearly defined. **(8 Points)**
- Project will not result in tangible improvements to zoning rules changes or advance housing development, but may improve the quality of life and wellbeing of current residents. **(3 Points)**

Priority Project Outcomes & Impact (Projects that meet the following criteria will receive bonus points)

- **BONUS:** Project will develop materials for compliance with M.G.L. Chapter 40A, Section 3A. **(5 Points)**
- **BONUS:** Project reasonably and realistically takes climate change and environmental sustainability into consideration. **(3 points)**
- **BONUS:** Project includes focus and intent to produce affordable housing. **(4 points)**

**Housing Choice Best Practices:****Zoning best practices (maximum 8 points):**

- 1. Multi-Family allowed by right:** Have at least one zoning district that allows multifamily by right (in addition to 40R districts) where there is capacity to add units and that allows for family housing that is not age restricted and does not restrict units with more than 2 bedrooms (or have a pattern of approving such developments over the last 5 years). **(1 point)**
- 2. Inclusionary Zoning, with density bonus:** Have Inclusionary Zoning that provides for reasonable density increases so that housing is not unreasonably precluded. **(2 points)**
- 3. 40R or 40Y Starter Home District:** Have an approved 40R Smart Growth or 40Y Starter Homes district that remains in compliance with the 40R or 40Y regulations, as applicable. Please note, that if your community repealed its only 40R district, it no longer qualifies for this best practice. **(2 points)**
- 4. Mixed-Use or Cluster Development:** Have zoning that allows residential/mixed use or cluster / Open Space Residential development by right that is not part of a 40R district (or have a pattern of approving such developments over the last 5 years). **(1 point)**
- 5. Accessory Dwelling Units (ADU):** Have zoning that allows for accessory dwelling units by right (or have a pattern of approving ADUs over the last 5 years). **(1 point)**
- 6. Multi-Family Parking Requirement:** Reduced parking requirement for Multi-Family units within the last 5 years or require no more than 1 parking space per unit for multifamily units. **(1 point)**

**Other best practices (maximum 14 points):**

- 1. Local actions that support housing:** Designated local resources for housing such as established an Affordable Housing Trust, donated or surplus land for re-use or redevelopment of housing, or spent substantial Community Preservation Act (CPA) funds for community housing over the last 5 years. **(2 points)**
- 2. Land Use Board training:** Provide evidence of education and training for a majority of members on a land use board (Planning Board, Board of Appeals, Select Board and/or City Council) from **Citizen Planner Training Collaborative**, Massachusetts Housing Partnership's **Housing Institute**, Community Development Partnership's **Lower Cape Housing Institute**, or Urban Land Institute's (ULI's) **Urban Plan Public Leadership Institute** over the last 5 years. **(1 point)**
- 3. 40B pattern or approval:** Have a demonstrated pattern of working with 40B developers to achieve greater affordability by accepting 40B projects without imposing conditions that render the projects uneconomic. **(2 points)**
- 4. SHI at or above 10%:** Have units currently eligible for inclusion in the Subsidized Housing Inventory (SHI) that equal or exceed 10% of total year-round housing stock according to the EOHLC subsidized housing inventory, where reaching such 10% threshold was not

the result of having a local comprehensive permit decision overturned by the Housing Appeals Committee (HAC). **(2 points)**

5. **SHI increased at least 2.5%:** Have increased your community's SHI by at least 2.5% points in the last 5 years where such increase was not the result of having a local comprehensive permit decision overturned by the Housing Appeals Committee (HAC). **(2 points)**
6. **Participate in one of the following EOHLC Housing Programs:** Housing Development Incentive Program (HDIP), have adopted an Urban Center Housing Tax Increment Financing district, approved District Improvement Financing (DIF) related to housing, have adopted an Urban Renewal Plan that includes a significant Housing element. **(1 point)**
7. **Property tax relief / Community Impact Fee:** Have adopted local option property tax relief programs for income eligible seniors either as provided for by statute (MGL c. 59 section 5) or through a home rule petition; OR have adopted a Community Impact Fee for short term rentals (MGL c. 64G, section 3D) where your community has committed in writing to using a portion of such revenues for affordable housing. **(2 points)**
8. **Housing Production Plan:** Have a CERTIFIED Housing Production Plan which means that you have an EOHLC approved Housing Production Plan and have subsequently seen an increase of 0.5% or 1% in your year-round housing units within the required time frame (see <https://www.mass.gov/service-details/chapter-40-b-housing-production-plan> for more information) **(1 point)**
9. **Housing Plan Implementation:** Demonstrated implementation of at least two strategies identified in a Housing Production Plan, housing component of a Master Plan, Housing Needs Assessment, or other housing related plan or analysis, other than adoption of the best practices specifically listed above. **(1 point)**

**BEST PRACTICE NOTE:** If an applicant claims a Best Practice and its bonus points but is unable to provide evidence to support their claim, EOHLC reserves the right to give no score (0 points) if claims are unsubstantiated.