Massachusetts Autism Commission

Housing Subcommittee Meeting Minutes

September 26, 2024 2:00 – 3:30

Via Zoom

Members present: Bronia Clifton (co-chair), Laurie Anastopoulus, Carolyn Kain, Dianne Lescinskas, Michelle Harris, Chris Peltier, Catherine Boyle, Nan Leonard and Carol Gracia

Ms. Clifton called the meeting to order and welcomed the members to the meeting of this Subcommittee. It was noted that Victor Hernandez was not able to attend the meeting and the agenda item that he was to present will be moved to November.

Ms. Clifton reviewed the history of the Housing Subcommittee and the challenges of not meeting in a few years due to COVID and the shift in priorities in MA as well as the former co-chair stepping down. Laurie Anastopoulus is the new co-chair of this subcommittee, and she introduced herself.

**Updates:**

Affordable Homes Act passed this summer with new legislative changes and the most exciting componentizes the change in Accessory Dwelling Units. There is flexibility for families to add accessory dwelling units for family member with a disability or elderly member. There is a website to access resources and a special section with a deep understanding of accessory units.

* the accessory unit will need to be built in the same lot of primary dwelling
* it can be attached or detached
* 900 sq. feet (unit)
* The law states it can be built as of right in a single-family home lot
* Must meet the city/town zoning codes
* The law will take effect on 2/2/2025
* The city/town can do a site plan review
* City/town cannot require owner occupancy
* Cannot require parking space within a 5-mile radius of transit – if outside of the 5 mile radius, require one parking space
* Uses – housing for someone with a disability, senior, the caregiver, relatives, guests
* You can rent out for short term – this rule depends on the city/town rules
* Other states are doing this

Bond Authorization – bond cap runs home modification – if we don’t expand bond cap annually, we won’t have a bond volume cap – the need is to expand bond cap annually. When implementing of this is further along, Ms. Clifton will have someone from Livable Community come and talk with subcommittee members about funding strategies.

A new housing development under SCF – 10 units – ASD individuals for housing – DDS project and will ask for SCF

* SCF was set up as a carve out for DDS and DMH – there are projects that have received other resources from the state
* Resources for priority 1 – it is all about the availability - using housing voucher/housing lottery
* Historically, SCF was used for group homes – 7-10 million per year – we need to think beyond SCF and look at other resources

Question was asked regarding Section 8 Housing Voucher list and individuals with disabilities getting purged from the list – could DOHLC interact with DDS about Section 8 list and not purging the list. It was suggested that it is a good idea to check your name on the list yearly to see if the individual is still on the list. It has been reported that if your name is removed from the list, you are not notified. Data sharing among secretariats is a big challenge.

Ms. Clifton will inquire about the individuals who were purged from the list in 2019 – she will inquire with the Rental Assistance Division. One reason for purging the list is due to the individual moved (can’t get in touch with mailings) so they had not heard from them so they will take them off the list.

**Review of Recommendations**

Recommendation #1

*The Housing Subcommittee will develop case studies of existing state-funded housing projects for individuals with ASD to assist the affordable housing field in Massachusetts in planning and developing sound affordable housing projects for individuals with ASD. Case studies will provide information on public and private financing sources, costs, design features, development and operational innovations and challenges*

Reframing – we will develop case studies and findings. Ms. Clifton is reviewing some of the projects that have had many challenges.

Ms. Anastopoulus discussed pursing units - 50% will support ID/ASD or ASD only with 30 hours of staff support through DDS. They will support job development, community center and peer support. You can use a Mass. Rental voucher /local resources as well as other resources. Ms. Anastopoulus will present more information on this project at our November meeting and this project could be used as a case study.

Recommendation #2

*The Housing Subcommittee will track the implementation of the Affordable Homes Act with specific attention to the changes to state law regarding ADUs, the Home Modification Program, the Facilities Consolidation Fund, and other programs and legislative changes that could be leveraged to support affordable housing for individuals with ASD.*

There are interesting elements in this law – we should track the implementation and look at how to leverage opportunities legislatively.

Ms. Kain discussed the upcoming Autism Commission meeting on October 24th and the focus on priorities – there is no requirement to add additional recommendations – we are working on our priorities for this subcommittee.

It was said that the priorities felt like they are DDS centric and stated that DMH also does housing – we should be looking at other agencies that support housing and housing supports.

This subcommittee did have representation from DMH in the past and we have a new member from DMH that is joining us. We will request someone from MRC to participate.

Ms. Boyle wants to revisit on how to establish data on people who are homeless and ASD. There was an effort to include a question on disability for the Point of Time group from the City of Boston and the January 9th effort – there was a framing of the question on ASD, but they found it awkward, and we will need to work on the wording of the question.

MassHealth is collecting information on who is homeless – we could ask if they are also collecting information on homelessness and disability.

We should reach out to Healthcare for the Homeless. Also, Ms. Boyle discussed the Continuum of Care’s point system – there are no points allocated for a neurological disability – how can we change the point system.

**Housing Survey**

Ms. Boyle shared the 2021/2022 Housing Survey

[Autism Housing Pathways announces results of housing survey - Autism Housing Pathways](https://autismhousingpathways.org/autism-housing-pathways-announces-results-of-housing-survey/)

* The 2021/2022 Housing Survey had 100 more participants ages 18+
* Half of the participants shared they have too many skills for 24/7 care but still lack skills to live independently
* Many individuals need prompting
* Most common issues – assistance with appointments, money management, paperwork
* Lack awareness of existing benefits
* The report has a one-page summary that was updated to reflect ADU’s and free community college
* Research shows that people who don’t choose who they live with end up in the ED due to medical conditions and behavioral issues
* The recommendations from the Housing Survey report reflect Ms. Boyles interpretation on how to improve the housing situation for individuals ASD – it includes possible approaches to improving access to affordable and supportive housing for individuals with ASD.
* The system has not kept up pace with the needs and the challenges that people face.

This subcommittee will meet again on November 21st at 1:00 – 2:30. With not further business to discuss, the meeting was adjourned.