

ELEMENT 421: STATE HOUSING PLAN

01 INTRODUCTION

State Guide Plan Element 421, State Housing Plan, was approved by the State Planning Council on March 9, 2000, and as of that date replaces the prior State Housing Plan (adopted in 1979) and the Areawide Housing Plan (adopted in 1984).

The element establishes state goals and policies for housing. It also makes an inventory of subsidized housing and analyzes major housing problems. Based on these findings, the Plan makes recommendations to governmental, quasi-governmental, and private agencies with an involvement in housing.

There are five basic parts to this element:

- 421.1 updates goals and policies of the prior State Housing Plan and the Areawide Housing Plan.
- 421.2 discusses the need for more regional planning, and recent housing laws that have had a significant impact on housing since the earlier state housing plans were adopted.
- 421.3 establishes the basis for report conclusions by outlining the most prevalent housing problems in the state.
- 421.4 provides an inventory of existing housing resources.
- 421.5 makes implementation proposals based on both the Plan's findings, and a summary of consensus findings of local comprehensive plan housing elements.

02 Issues Addressed

This plan serves as a guide to aid the public and private sectors in providing affordable housing , in standard condition, and in a suitable living environment, for all Rhode Island residents, with special emphasis on the housing needs of lower-income households and individuals.

03 Goals and Policies

421.1 sets forth the housing goals and policies for the state.

A. Goals

Housing goals are discussed on page 1.1 of the housing element. They were derived from reformulating and combining earlier plan goals as listed in the 1979 State Housing Plan and the 1984 Areawide Housing Plan. These goals have also been updated to reflect the general intent of certain federal state legislative mandates and local comprehensive plan housing elements. The goals are:

1. Quantity: promote orderly residential growth, conserve neighborhood cohesiveness, and ensure there will continue to be a sufficient number of housing units for population needs.
2. Quality: preserve and protect the public health, safety, stability, and welfare of residential neighborhoods through building code, and minimum housing code standards.

3. **Variety:** provide equal access for all residents to a wide range of housing choices and available financing.
4. **Accessibility:** locate housing within reasonable proximity to potential employment, retail businesses, recreational opportunities, and public transportation.
5. **Affordability:** provide an adequate number of affordable housing units for low income, and special need citizens.

B. Policies

Policies are on pages 1.2 and 1.3 of the housing element. They are intended to be broad enough to account for a wide variety of circumstances. The encouragement of activities such as “smart” development, preservation, rehabilitation, and affordable housing within this section establish a context for the formulation of housing element implementation proposals.

The Housing Policies of the State of Rhode Island are:

1. **Population and Diversity:** to use the most reliable population and housing statistics available to periodically establish and update state housing proposals; promote diversity of housing types and affordability; and help different racial, ethnic, and special population groups find suitable housing.
2. **Housing Code Enforcement:** promote the updating and enforcement of the various housing codes and ordinances within the State.
3. **Stabilizing and Protecting Existing Areas:** help protect historic as well as other essential aspects of neighborhoods that provide identity and character; help residents from being displaced; and promote ground water protection, watershed management, and flooding abatement.
4. **Improved Usage of Existing Structures:** support the best use and maintenance of existing housing stock.
5. **Optimum Locations for New Housing Units:** encourage new housing construction as warranted, in proximity to planned or existing infrastructure; and support the expansion of neighborhoods relative to a closer relationship with local and regional needs.
6. **Affordable Housing and New Housing Concepts:** study, develop, and support improved methods, techniques, legal remedies, and institutional structures for producing low/moderate income affordable housing; and encourage improved planning of neighborhood development, growth management, affordable housing financing, and housing maintenance programs.

04 Implementation Proposals

Recommendations for housing priorities are:

1. **Emergency, Term, and Permanent Shelter for Vulnerable Populations:**

State and local governmental agencies responsible for reviewing data and services for the homeless should work with appropriate non-profit agencies to improve services,

program funding, laws and legal procedures to secure longer term or permanent housing for vulnerable populations.

2. Housing Rehabilitation and Code Enforcement:

State Level Recommendations:

Certain state departments, quasi-public agencies and commissions have mandated housing code or rehabilitation related responsibilities. These responsibilities vary from carrying out regulatory code activities, to periodic data gathering, planning, program origination, or supporting legislation and funding proposals. It is vital that these agencies not only carry out their own mandated housing programs but that they also work in cooperation with each other and with the new R.I. Housing Resources Commission which has recently been established to take a leadership role in housing.

There is a need for these agencies to work responsibly for the passage of a new housing rehabilitation code and a new minimum housing code, continue their involvement with diminishing lead paint problems, promote the setting aside of funds for the upgrading of seriously deteriorated neighborhoods, and encourage other reforms or pilot programs to abate housing deterioration.

Local Level Recommendations:

Local communities need to consider innovative programs such as pre-rental inspections, property tax incentives, and local non-profit housing agencies. They need to establish goals for housing and neighborhood maintenance in their comprehensive plans and in Community Development Block Grant Programs.

Minimum housing code procedures need to be scrutinized for maximum effectiveness. Finally, local planning agencies should keep current inventories of abandoned and severely dilapidated housing and work with other governmental and non-profit agencies to get such housing rehabilitated or demolished to protect the health, welfare and safety of the communities.

3. Special Population Housing Needs:

State agencies should survey housing problems of special population groups and encourage communities to provide housing opportunities for them through local comprehensive planning. A priority use of federal funding should be for obtaining permanent housing for homeless people, especially those with disabilities.

4. Equal Opportunity:

The need to foster equal housing opportunities for minority populations should be pursued in a number of ways. New census data for the year 2000 should be carefully analyzed to discern the needs of the minority populations in the various communities. Also, the state fair housing testing program, which was conducted periodically up until a few years ago to check on discriminatory housing practices, needs to be re-instated.

5. Affordability:

State support for technical courses and training needs to be provided for local elected community officials, including planning and zoning administrators, to help them gain an understanding of what their mandated responsibilities are regarding state affordable housing objectives.

There should also be periodic statewide housing conferences and workshops held for those involved with housing to provide federal and state policy and program information, and to suggest innovative ways to lower housing development costs.

The establishment of non-profit housing cooperatives for special categories of lower income households should be pursued.

Communities should try to encourage more affordable housing by: carefully considering costs for prospective buyers when making zoning ordinance residential lots size changes; encouraging the reduction of costs for residential construction, rehabilitation, and unit conversions; and providing for planned unit and cluster development in zoning regulations.

6. Availability:

The state should encourage the development of a wide variety of low cost housing options including: in-law apartments, manufactured housing, homesteading programs, self help construction opportunities, cooperative housing, and the conversion of obsolete buildings for condominiums and the housing of single individuals.

State agencies should back the establishment of non-profit housing cooperatives, especially for unique situations where other types of housing arrangements have not been successful.

Communities should change zoning and development regulations aimed at slowing or excluding certain residential development unless it can be substantiated that there is clear justification for having such regulations.

Balanced Growth Recommendations for Communities are:

An increase in residential densities should be considered in specific areas of communities when such actions would encourage new construction and rehabilitation in those areas without substantially increasing infrastructure, utility, and municipal maintenance costs.

Smart growth incentives for community revitalization and reinvestment should be pursued along with the preservation of open space and natural assets.

The intended goals and policies of local comprehensive plans need to be followed when making decisions on implementing contractor impact fees or mandatory dedications.

Use approved local comprehensive plan housing elements for guidance when considering such issues as promoting home ownership, residential units in urban center mixed use projects, and housing in proximity to other activities and existing facilities.