

The journey from housing to home: Introducing the Housing Choice Coalition

Hardly a day passes without a reference in local and national news outlets to the housing crisis. Homelessness is on the rise; seniors are priced out of the community and younger residents are unable to afford a home or to rent an affordable apartment. The Greater Newburyport area is experiencing a lack of affordable and available housing, especially for working class residents. Many of us have been touched by the housing problem or know someone who has been affected.

As a volunteer for the YWCA Greater Newburyport and former YWCA board member, I have been an advocate for more housing choice for many years. I have rallied my neighbors for affordable housing at the Brown School; I've spoken to the City Council about the need for more affordable housing and I took part in creating a rental subsidy program during the pandemic as a member of the city's Affordable Housing Trust. What has been missing is an organized group of residents who are willing to support these efforts; who can act as advocates and who can engage and educate the broader community about the need for more housing. Having a group of people who are also concerned about the housing crisis and who want to raise awareness in the community makes a big difference.

A recent collaboration between the YWCA and the Citizens Housing and Planning Association of Boston (CHAPA) has the potential to fill that gap by creating the Greater Newburyport Housing Choice Coalition. CHAPA is a highly respected housing advocacy organization in Massachusetts and has helped to organize similar advocacy groups throughout the state. The coalition will consist of residents of Newburyport, Newbury, West Newbury, Amesbury and Salisbury, along with service providers, church groups, elected and appointed officials from those communities. The group will engage in educating residents and political leaders regarding housing issues and will establish a set of housing goals along with strategies to meet those goals.

The coalition has held two meetings in 2023 and will hold monthly meetings in 2024. At our last meeting, we decided to focus on the following activities:

- Education: Provide opportunities for residents to learn about housing issues
- Advocacy: Petition local government to make changes to ordinances and bylaws that will result in more housing choice
- Projects: Advocate for specific affordable housing projects
- Community Focus: Organize for action in each of our member communities: Newburyport, Newbury, Salisbury, Amesbury or West Newbury

At each of our monthly meetings, members will organize working groups with a focus in these areas and will create goals and strategies and will share accomplishments. In addition to our

monthly meetings, this paper will publish a series of articles contributed by coalition members, that will focus on housing issues and events in our community. Everyone is welcome to join the coalition and to contribute to making our communities more inclusive and welcoming. We are excited to have you to join us on this journey from housing to home.

My name is Judy Tymon and I am the coordinator for the Greater Newburyport Housing Choice Coalition. For more information, please contact us at jmeers@ywcanewburyport.org.