

United Interfaith Action of Southeastern MA (UIA)

The Housing Crisis in New Bedford and What Is Needed Now!

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Community Leaders from United Interfaith Action of Southeastern MA (also known as UIA) held a press conference on Tuesday, February 15th at Our Lady of Guadalupe at St. James Church to address the state of housing in New Bedford, sharing data, community stories, and proposals of action on this crucial issue. From the lack of affordable housing, to high rates of evictions, to tenants being priced out by rising rents, and the numbers experiencing homelessness, the issue of housing is at a critical point in New Bedford, much like many cities and towns across the nation.

With the City set to receive over \$80 Million in ARPA federal, COVID recovery funds, will Housing receive the funding it deserves?

There is a housing crisis in New Bedford that needs to be addressed.

- **SEVERELY COST BURDENED:** In New Bedford, 47% of households are “*cost burdened*”, spending more than 30% of income on housing costs, and 23% of households are “*severely cost burdened*”, spending more than 50% of income on housing. This is compared to 29 percent “cost burdened” and 14 percent “severely cost burdened” of households statewide.
- **HUGE WAITLISTS FOR HOUSING:** 4,131 people on New Bedford’s Section 8 (federal subsidy) waitlist; 4,378 on New Bedford’s MRVP (state subsidy) waitlist; 4,087 on the City’s waitlist for public housing
- **DEVASTATING NUMBERS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS:**
 - 2021 Point in Time Count: 372 individuals in shelters, transitional housing, or on the streets
 - NBPS: 1,298 students have experienced homeless during this school year, to date
- **HIGHEST RATES OF EVICTION**
 - Bristol Co. has the highest eviction rate in MA: 813 since Oct 2020 (state’s moratorium end)
 - New Bedford has the third highest eviction rate of cities/towns in MA: 299 since Oct 2020

“Currently, the City of New Bedford is considering how to distribute the \$80+ Million in ARPA, federal COVID recovery funds. While all areas put forward in the Mayor’s current proposed ARPA budget are integral to our City, we would like to see Housing as the top priority for ARPA funding.”

The quality of life and the stability of our community is at stake. People are being priced out and struggling to make their way forward. The sustainable and stable future of our City is connected to housing. Investing in the rehabilitation and creation of affordable housing is putting our people first.” - Renee Ledbetter, President of the UIA Board and Director of the New Bedford Shannon Program

Sources for Affordable Housing Funding that New Bedford can Utilize

- A. **American Rescue Plan (ARPA)** - Federal, COVID Relief Funds of \$80M+ New Bedford is set to receive
- B. **Community Preservation Act Funds (CPA)** - A fund that is derived from a small surcharge on property taxes. 10% must be used for parks & greenspace, 10% must be used toward historic preservation, and 10% must be used toward community housing. The remaining 70% of CPA can be allocated by the City in any of these areas.
- C. **Community Development Block Grants (CDBG)** - An annual federal grant that can be used for economic development, human services, neighborhood improvement, and housing.
- D. **Inclusionary Development Program** - Many cities, towns in Massachusetts have this program which requires developers for market rate rental or homeownership housing to set affordable rents on 10% or more of the rental units or to set affordable selling prices on 10% or more of homeownership units. Developers can alternatively put money into a fund for affordable housing at an estimated rate of \$300,000-\$400,000 per unit if they do not want to create the affordable units in their development.

These sources of funding represent opportunities to address the housing crisis in New Bedford. We all want the same for our great City: a thriving community, a stable and secure place to raise our families, a place where we can live, work, and partake of all this City has to offer. Yet, this vision struggles to find its ways to reality when basic housing needs are not met for all residents. As we build up our schools, create economic opportunity, and enhance our community spaces, we need to build up the individuals and families with it by providing more affordable housing opportunities.

Is there the political and communal will to put housing at the center of our priorities for our City?

UIA’s Proposals on how to spend housing funds

A. Creation of More Affordable Housing

1. **Allocate funds for new construction or substantial renovation for affordable housing**, including seed money to community organizations invested in creating affordable housing.
2. **Enable working class people to become homeowners** with increased opportunities for first-time homebuyer grants that support downpayment and closing cost assistance.

B. Housing Stabilization for Renters

1. **Establish a City Emergency Housing Fund of rental subsidies** to prevent evictions and foreclosures in cases where the state cannot respond fast

enough or the state cannot assist those who make over the income eligibility requirement of state assistance but are still at risk of losing their housing.

2. **Establish a Legal Services Fund** to hire additional lawyers to ensure tenants have legal representation in eviction cases. During the pandemic, only a small percentage of tenants (5-8%) have had legal representation in the Southeast Housing Court, which has the highest rate of evictions in MA.

C. Addressing Homelessness

1. **Funding for supportive housing for those experiencing homelessness.** The City needs more supportive housing such as a central place to offer housing along with transitional support.
2. **Establish a Day Program with Supports for those experiencing homelessness.** Currently the City has night shelters, but no active day program offering support and shelter.

UIA's Proposal on ARPA Funding for Housing

Currently Mayor Mitchell, in deliberation with the City Council, is deciding how to spend over \$80Million in ARPA Federal, COVID relief funds. The Mayor's current proposal has the highest amount allotted toward Arts, Culture, Hospitality, and Tourism at \$18Million, with Housing and Neighborhood Stabilization at \$13Million.

During the Housing Crisis in New Bedford, we need housing to be raised up as a priority for further funding.

UIA would like to see \$8Million more of the ARPA Funds shifted towards Housing. This would raise housing to around 25% of the total ARPA funding, signifying the importance of this issue.

The City has a unique opportunity with the ARPA funds, and we are asking the City to make this investment. The sustainable future of our City is connected to housing. Investing in the creation of affordable housing and stabilizing housing for so many in our community is investing in our people, and that will pay off long into the future.

"Housing insecurity impacts so many in our community. As a teacher in New Bedford, I have witnessed more times than I care to recall the impact that housing has on our children. I have had numerous homeless students over the years. Poverty does not discriminate. Many people live paycheck-to-paycheck. I also have friends suddenly displaced from their homes due to fires or faulty contracting work. One unexpected hardship for any of us can mean the difference between having a roof over our head or being on the streets." Kelly Haggerty, New Bedford resident and teacher at Greater New Bedford Vocational Technical School

United Interfaith Action (UIA) is a faith-based community organization addressing racial and economic justice in Southeastern MA for over 25 years in its core cities of New Bedford and Fall River. After hundreds of conversations with community members in the past year, Housing emerged as a priority area for UIA. In the coming months we will propose funding and policy proposals to address this crucial issue in our community. Statewide UIA is affiliated with the *Massachusetts Communities Action Network* and nationally with the *Faith In Action* Network.

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