

Affordable housing projects get financial boost from city

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By Michael Kelley The Forecaster

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Portland City Council approved using federal and local funds for projects that will bring 100 affordable housing units to the city. *Michael Kelley / The Forecaster*

PORTLAND — Portland’s affordable housing crunch got a little bit of relief, thanks to \$1 million in recently awarded funding that will increase housing stock in the city.

Since 2000, the city has used federal and local funding to help subsidize more than 1,280 housing units around Portland, but the need for affordable housing in the city and state is still strong.

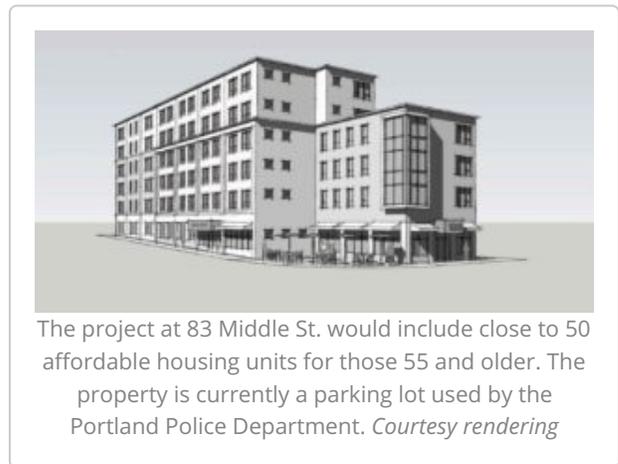
“The need is growing. It may not be growing fast but it is constantly growing,” said Mark Adelson, executive director of Portland Housing Authority, which helps to provide homes for low-income residents.

Adelson said there are 932 public housing program applicants waiting for available units in the properties Portland Housing Authority owns or manages. Those include Kennedy Park, Franklin Towers, and Sagamore Village, among others. There is also a lengthy waiting list for the housing choice voucher program, which offers low-income residents vouchers for privately-owned properties.

On Sept. 4, city councilors awarded more than \$1 million in Home Investment Partnership Program Fund and Housing Trust Fund money to three affordable housing projects across the city that will increase the affordable housing stock in Portland. Two of the projects will set aside a portion of units for those living in the city's homeless shelter.

The Home Investment Partnership Program, a federal Housing and Urban Development program, awards grants to states and municipalities for the "building, buying, and/or rehabilitating affordable housing for rent or homeownership." The Housing Trust Fund is a locally-sourced fund that helps to develop housing for those individuals who make 120 percent of the annual median income and are not eligible for HUD funding.

One of the projects that got funding at last week's council meeting is a project from Community Housing of Maine that calls for the construction of a six-story building at 83 Middle St. that would include 23 studio apartments, 23 one-bedroom apartments and three, two-bedroom apartments. The units would be available for those whose incomes are up to 80 percent of the area median income, or \$52,080, as long as the average income of residents at the property remains under 60 percent of the average median income (\$39,060).



The housing would be for those 55 and older and include 11 units set aside for long-term residents at the city's homeless shelter. It would also include a first-floor commercial space.

That plan took a step forward last week when the City Council agreed to allocate \$193,266 in Home Investment Partnership Program Funds and \$136,734 in Housing Trust Funds to the project and lease the property to Community Housing of Maine for \$1 a year for 99 years. The property is now used as a surface parking lot for the Portland Police Department.

William Higgins, a resident of Elm Terrance, a Community Housing of Maine property at 68 State St., told councilors this type of housing is very much needed in the city.

"I would have been considered a long-term stayer in the shelter," Higgins said. "I was in the Portland shelter for more than three years before I was housed in Biddeford in a CHOM (Community Housing of Maine) project and then I moved back up to Portland. We need to have those available units."

The next step for Community Housing of Maine is to apply for low-income tax credits from Maine Housing by Thursday, Sept. 26. The project still has to go before the Planning Board for site plan approval. It would be the first affordable housing project in the India Street neighborhood since the old North School at 248 Congress St. was renovated in the 1980s.

Since 1993, CHOM has developed 747 units of affordable housing in 78 sites across 31 communities.

In addition to the Middle Street project, Developers Collaborative was given just less than \$300,000 in Home Investment Partnership Program Funds to construct a new building behind 66 State St. that would house 30 low-income units, including 10 for those staying in the shelter.

The units, which would include 14 efficiency and 16 one-bedrooms, would be affordable for individuals making 60 percent of the area median income or less. Construction is anticipated to begin in May 2020 and be completed in a year. In recent years, Developers Collaborative has completed affordable housing projects at the Motherhouse on Stevens Avenue and Rosa True on Park Street.



Developers Collaborative is proposing constructing a new four-story 30-unit affordable housing building behind 66 State St. *Rendering courtesy of Archetype Architects*

Portland Housing Development Corporation was given \$425,000 from the Housing Trust Fund to renovate a multi-family building at 47 Boyd St. from a 9-unit building to a 12-unit building.

“This is very near to my house,” Councilor Belinda Ray said prior to voting on the allocation for the 47 Boyd St. project. “I walk past it frequently. It has been vacant for some time because it is in such sad shape. I am happy it will be rehabilitated and renovated.”

The building would include eight units affordable at 50% of the area median income, one unit at 80% of the area median income and three market-rate units.

The project, according to information from the city, is expected to start in December and be completed next summer.

Portland Housing Development Corporation also has an affordable housing project in the works at 58 Boyd St. and plans to redevelop and expand the public housing on Front Street.

Ray said the three projects the council awarded funding to on Sept. 4 will address some of the housing need in the city, but doesn't address all of the city's housing needs.

“We have a lot of housing being built at the very high end and the very low end (of the income spectrum), but we are missing the middle,” she said.

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