

“Affordable Housing” - A Cheat Sheet

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Most people find places to live through the PRIVATE MARKET. These are apartments and homes that are rented and sold through private owners without government involvement. Some of this housing is quite “affordable” to lower income people. But, sometimes market prices are too high for lower income people and they need one of the following government assisted units. These units are generally only open to legal US residents:

- 1) “Public” Housing
- 2) “Subsidized” Housing
- 3) Rental “Vouchers” - Section 8 Program

“Public” Housing

Public housing is built, owned and operated by a government agency called a Housing Authority. Most towns have them. Below are some of the pros and cons of this housing:

- You pay 30% of your income for rent – many times some utilities are included
- You apply at each housing authority separately and wait times can be from 6 months to 10 years
- Many times, only open to families (w/children), elders or people with disabilities
- Many cities and towns have local preference, so it is usually best to apply where you live.
- Quality of units and communities vary considerably

Public Housing Resources Include:

Watertown Housing Authority: 617-923-3950

Belmont Housing Authority: 617-484-2160

Newton Housing Authority: 617-552-5501

Brookline Housing Authority: 617-277-2022

Waltham Housing Authority: 781-894-3357

“Subsidized” Housing

Subsidized housing is built, owned and operated by a private corporation (for profit or non-profit) that received assistance of some kind from the government. The assistance may have been a loan, zoning relief, discounted land, etc. In exchange for that assistance the private corporation must agree to provide some units for lower income families. Below are the pros and cons of this housing:

- Rent may be a flat set amount OR you may pay 30% of your income for rent
- You must usually apply with each property management company separately
- Wait times are usually at least 2-3 years
- Condition of the units is usually pretty good because it is heavily regulated

Locate Subsidized Housing at:

www.MassHousing.com – click on “Rental Housing” and look up the Housing List by development or town

www.massaccesshousingregistry.org –search by town, region or apartment size

www.mbhpr.org – click on “Apartment Listings”

Rental Vouchers like Section 8

Rental vouchers are a government guarantee to a landlord that the rent will be paid. Usually, a Housing Authority signs a contract between the housing authority, the tenant and the private landlord establishing how much the tenant will pay and then how much the housing authority will pay directly to the landlord. You apply for Section 8 at Housing Authorities and a centralized wait-list

- You can take a rental voucher to any apartment as long as it passes a basic housing quality inspection **and** as long as the rent is within the Housing Authority's PAYMENT STANDARD
- You pay 30% of your income for rent, the government pays the difference
- VERY long wait list: 8 to 10 years

Locate Rental Vouchers at:

- 1) www.massnahro.org/S8_Home.php - to get on the centralized wait list
- 2) Local Housing Authorities (phone numbers above)

Rooming Houses and Shelters

When you really just need a roof over your head you may need to look into "rooming houses," where you rent a room, often with shared kitchens and/or bathrooms. Or you may need to find a shelter bed until you can get back on your feet.

Locate Rooming Houses and Shelters:

- Caritas (for Rooming Houses): www.caritascommunities.org or call 781-843-1606
- Mass. Dept. of Housing at www.mass.gov/dhcd - click on "Housing Stabilization" or call 877-413-3308

Buying an Affordable Home

There are many steps you will need to take to buy a home. "Affordable" homes will be deed-restricted and limit the amount of equity you can earn over time. To begin, you should consider taking a home buyer class. Next, you will want to know how much you can afford to borrow from a bank or lender (by being pre-approved for a loan). Then you can go look for a home. The below websites are good places to start:

- 1) www.chapa.org – click on "Looking for Housing"
- 2) www.mhp.net – click on "Homeownership"
- 3) www.massaffordablehomes.org – search homes for sale by town

How Metro West CD Can Help

1. Get your name of the Regional READY Renter Program

Metro West CD maintains a data base of households looking for apartments. As we learn about rental opportunities we will pass that information on to you via mail and/or e-mail updates. Metro West CD staff also maintain a file of "live" apartment listings, come browse the list.

2. Get your "papers" together workshop

Most affordable housing will require that you have considerable paperwork such as paystubs, bank statements, birth certificates, etc. Metro West CD staff can help you sort your documents and be prepared for applying for apartments.

3. Get your credit together workshop

More and more landlords are looking at credit scores. Metro West CD staff can help you get your credit report and identify opportunities for improving your credit score.

4. Know your rights and responsibilities of tenancy

There are many legal obligations both you and your landlord have. Make sure you know them! Metro West CD staff can review with you the common mistakes landlords and tenants make that get them in trouble.

5. Other financial education workshops

Periodically Metro West CD offers financial education workshops such as how to establish a budget, how to open a checking account, etc.

CONTACT ROBYN at 617-923-3505 x 4 to set up any of these services.