

# MetroWest Housing Coalition

## *Report on Affordable Housing Access in Framingham*

### Overview

The MetroWest Housing Coalition is a diverse group of stakeholders who work together to support access to affordable housing in the MetroWest region<sup>1</sup> (please see Appendix A for listing of participating organizations). We collaborate to share resources, engage in advocacy opportunities, and address systemic barriers to housing stability.

Over the past several months, the MetroWest Housing Coalition has been working on a research project around affordable housing access in Framingham. Through a series of 15 community listening sessions, we engaged 166 residents to solicit their input on the current housing landscape in the city, including challenges, strengths, and areas of opportunity for improvement<sup>2</sup>. This document serves to synthesize the findings.

While it is widely documented that there is a housing crisis across the state of Massachusetts, we understand that the way that communities experience this crisis is unique and varied<sup>3</sup>. This community listening session project focused on gathering diverse perspectives and experiences related to affordable housing among Framingham residents. The goal is to provide a platform for community members to share their challenges, needs, and input regarding affordable housing. The findings from this project aim to offer insight into resident experiences with affordable housing, serving as a springboard for future research as the City of Framingham develops a Housing Production Plan.

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<sup>1</sup> Including the following cities/towns: Ashland, Bellingham, Dover, Framingham, Franklin, Holliston, Hopedale, Hopkinton, Hudson, Marlborough, Medfield, Medway, Mendon, Milford, Millis, Natick, Needham, Norfolk, Northborough, Sherborn, Southborough, Sudbury, Wayland, Wellesley, & Westborough.

<sup>2</sup> While demographic data was not explicitly collected, sessions were hosted exclusively within Framingham as to target Framingham residents.

<sup>3</sup> Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities Statewide Housing Plan, [Regional Listening Sessions Presentation](https://www.mass.gov/doc/regional-listening-sessions-overview/download), slides 4-5, accessed via chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.mass.gov/doc/regional-listening-sessions-overview/download

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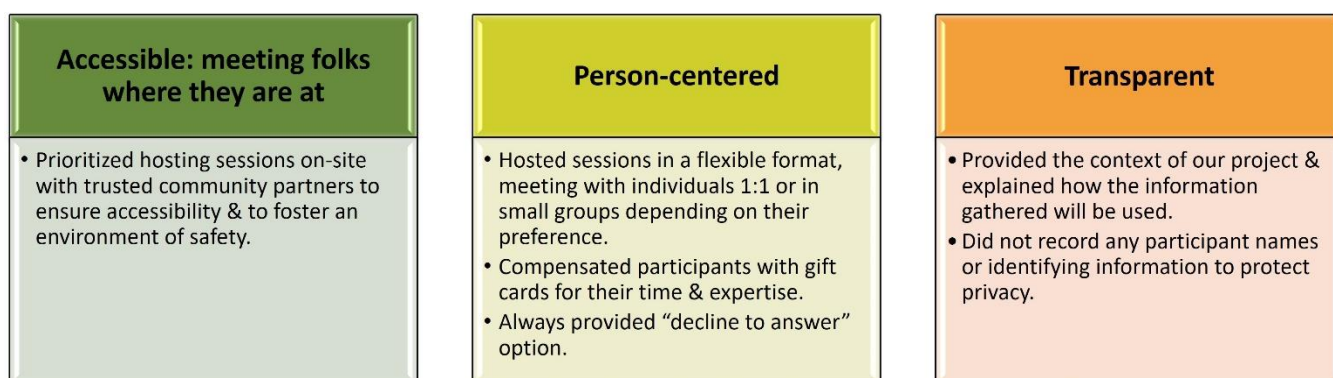
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## I. Objectives

- a. To gain a deeper understanding of residents' experiences in accessing affordable housing in Framingham.
- b. To compile and synthesize resident input to be shared with the City of Framingham to inform the development of a Housing Production Plan.

## II. Approach

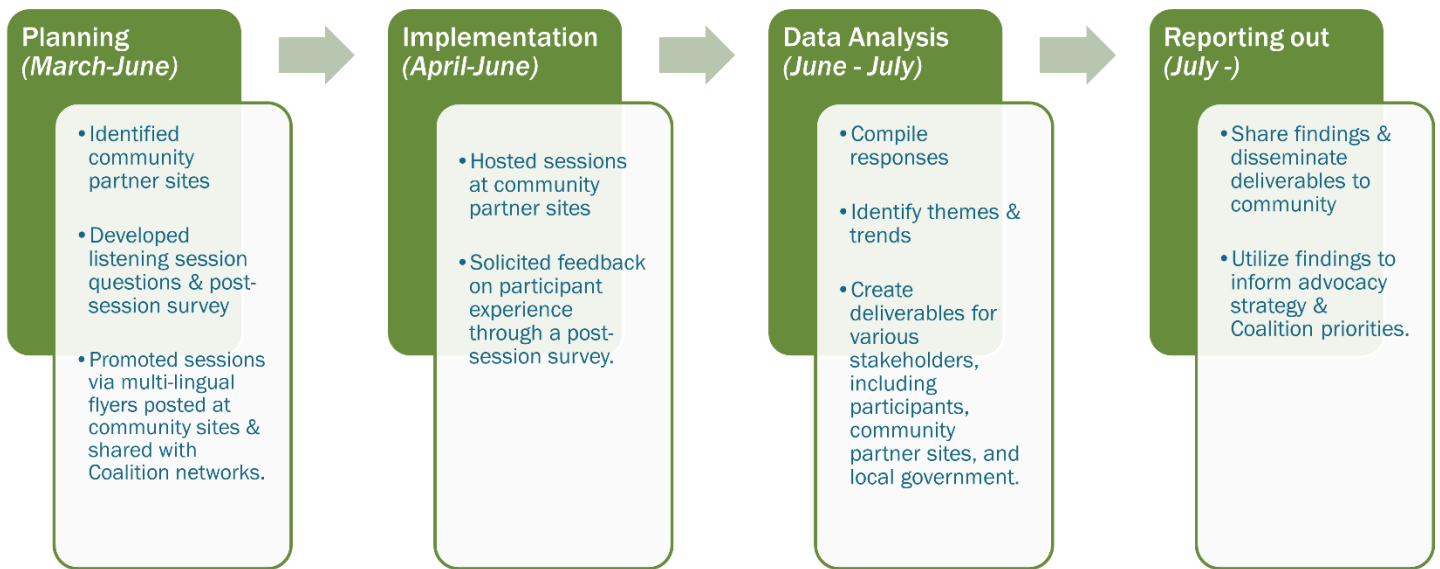
The approach to this research project was three-pronged, focusing on accessibility, being person-centered, and transparent throughout the process.



Listening sessions were hosted on-site at community partner locations in Framingham where residents were already familiar and had established trust. By leveraging the existing relationships and trusted community spaces, we were able to meet residents where they were, minimizing barriers to access. The research goals were explained prior to each listening session, including how the data would be used, to ensure informed consent.

During listening sessions, both individual and group conversations were conducted. While some residents wanted to speak 1:1, others preferred group discussions. In being person-centered, residents were empowered to guide the format of the listening sessions in the way that worked best for them. All questions had a “decline to answer” option and residents were reminded throughout the process to share as much or as little information as they felt comfortable. No respondent names or any personally identifiable information were collected to foster comfortability in sharing input. Residents were compensated with a gift card for their time.

### III. Process



In March 2024, the MetroWest Housing Coalition identified community partner sites that are important spaces to Framingham residents, and where individuals with affordable housing experiences are most likely to seek support. The sites included:

- Advocates – The Living Room Program
- The Brazilian American Center (BRACE)
- The Callahan Center
- Framingham Community Justice Support Center (FCJSC)
- Greater Framingham Community Church (GFCC)
- South Middlesex Opportunity Council (SMOC)
- Spectrum Health Systems
- Wayside Tempo Young Adult Resource Center
- MetroWest Care Connection (MWCC)

To capture a range of perspectives, community partners from across sectors were engaged, including substance use disorder treatment providers, youth programs, churches, immigration services, and re-entry support programs.

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In addition to identifying sites, the MetroWest Housing Coalition drafted a project introduction statement to contextualize the research and ensure residents’ informed consent prior to discussion. Appendix B contains the research introduction and questions used during listening sessions. Appendix C includes a survey to gather feedback on the sessions. Questions encompassed both open and closed-ended formats to gather qualitative and quantitative data.

The identifications of sites and the development of the listening session introduction, questions, and post-survey were collaborative processes involving input from coalition members at various stages.

Between March and June 2024, the listening sessions were promoted via multi-lingual flyers (English, Spanish, and Portuguese) posted at community sites and shared with the MetroWest Housing Coalition’s networks.

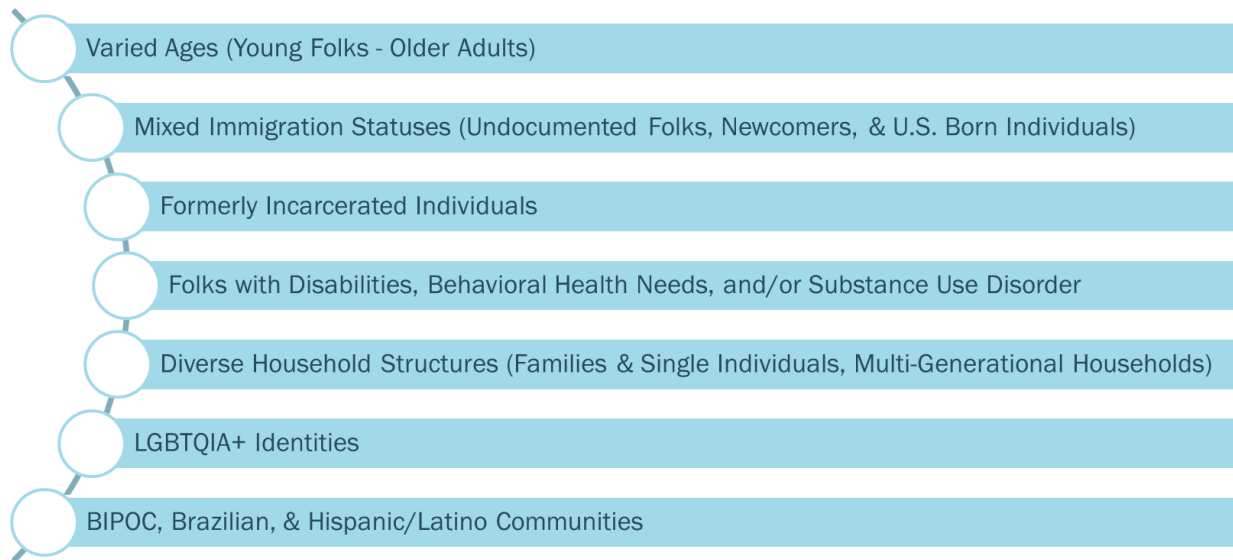
15 listening sessions were hosted from April 11, 2024 – June 4, 2024, engaging 166 total residents.

In collaboration with partner organizations and community locations, the below listening sessions were hosted:

<b>SMOC Day Center</b> 26 Residents	<b>SMOC Youth Program &amp; Tempo</b> 13 Residents	<b>Greater Framingham Community Church</b> 15 Residents	<b>Framingham Community Justice Support Center</b> 7 Residents
<b>The Callahan Center</b> 10 Residents	<b>Brazilian American Center (BRACE)</b> 21 Residents	<b>SMOC Main Office</b> 21 Residents	<b>SMOC Family Shelter</b> 3 Residents
<b>Spectrum Health Systems – Framingham Outpatient Clinic</b> 11 Residents	<b>MetroWest Care Connection Adult Resource Fair</b> 38 Residents	<b>Framingham Public Library</b> 1 Participant ( <i>referred by Advocates’ Living Room</i> )	

Listening session facilitators had Spanish, Portuguese, & Haitian Creole linguistic capacity. Though no explicit demographic data was collected, residents shared several aspects of their identities and lived experiences during conversations. Sites that serve specific populations, such as older adults, housing insecure families, and the Brazilian community, for instance, were also used to ensure reaching diverse communities, particularly those who have been historically marginalized.

Below please find an overview of the communities that were represented in the listening sessions:



Following the listening sessions, residents were encouraged to complete a survey on their experience.

During June 2024, the data was analyzed, and project deliverables were developed. Deliverables include this report and a flyer of findings to share with the community.

Beginning in July 2024, findings and deliverables will be disseminated to community stakeholders, including the individuals who participated in the listening sessions. Flyers of the findings will be shared in English, Spanish, and Portuguese with the sites where sessions were hosted.

***Please note that residents in this research project were exclusively tenants, and there was no representation from landlords or property owners. The findings below solely reflect the perspectives and experiences from Framingham tenants.***

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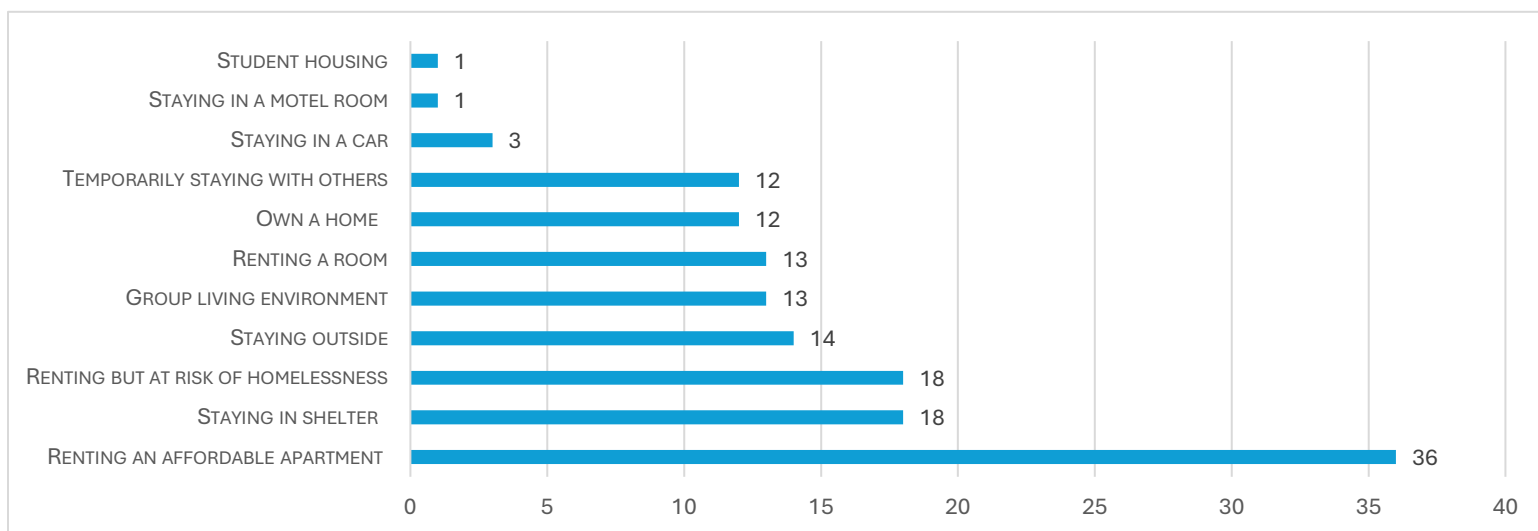
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## IV. Findings

### 1. HOUSING IN FRAMINGHAM PRESENTS SIGNIFICANT ACCESSIBILITY AND AFFORDABILITY CHALLENGES

Findings revealed that while some were in stable affordable housing<sup>4</sup>, a striking 56% of residents have an unstable housing situation. This includes those who are in shelters, renting apartments they cannot afford, staying outside, sleeping in their cars, or temporarily staying with others. Below Graph 1 shows the breakdown of residents' current housing statuses:

Graph 1: Residents' Housing Statuses



Source: Listening session data

#### Barriers to Affordable Housing in Framingham

In speaking with residents as to the housing challenges they face, several barriers arose ranging from lack of knowledge on housing resources, to discrimination when trying to access housing. The most prevalent reasons why residents struggle to secure affordable housing are displayed below in Graph 2:

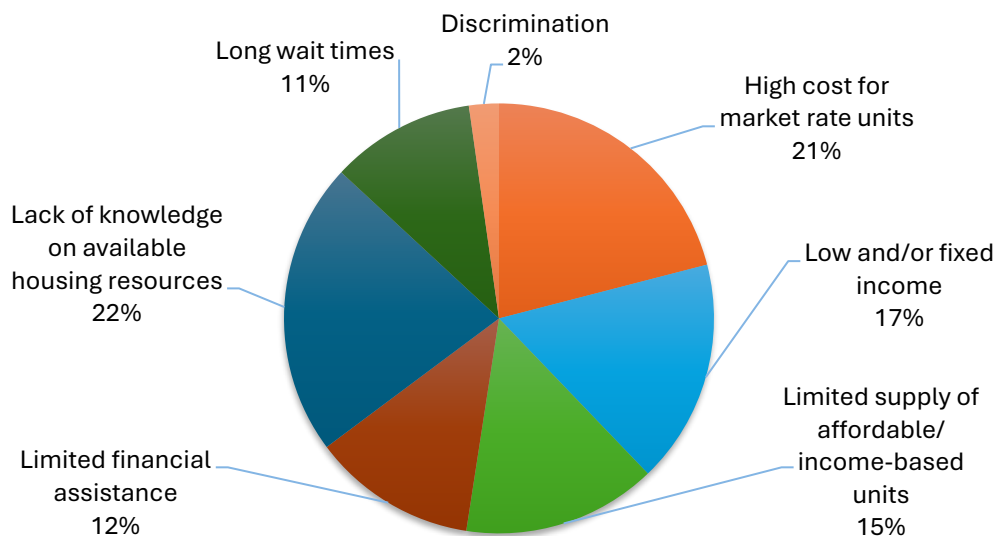
<sup>4</sup> According to the [U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development](#), affordable housing “is housing on which the occupant is paying no more than 30 percent of gross income for housing costs, including utilities.”

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Graph 2: Reported Barriers to Affordable Housing



Source: Listening session data

As the data show, “lack of knowledge on available housing resources” was noted as the top barrier for residents trying to obtain affordable housing. Many residents expressed that they do not always know where to turn for housing assistance, or even what resources might be available to them. This issue was also raised as one of the biggest concerns around housing in the community.

To better understand what services residents are aware of, they were asked to share where they would go if in need of housing assistance. Overwhelmingly, residents cited South Middlesex Opportunity Council (SMOC) as the main resource when confronted with housing related problems in Framingham. The following housing service providers were also identified:

- The Brazilian American Center (BRACE)
- The Callahan Center
- Framingham Housing Authority (FHA)
- Jewish Family Services (JFS)
- MetroWest Care Connection (MWCC)
- Justice Resource Institute (JRI) Program RISE
- Wayside Youth and Family Support Network Tempo Program
- The United Way

While lack of knowledge is certainly a large issue, closer examination of Graph 2 conveys that economic reasons ultimately prove to be the overarching challenge for residents. When looking at the broader categorization of reported barriers, 65% of residents indicated

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an obstacle related to housing costs and/or household income (including high cost for market rate units at 21%, low and/or fixed income at 17%, limited supply of affordable units at 15%, & limited financial assistance at 12%). The high cost of housing and lack of available units of all types were indicated as top concerns for the Framingham community.

Credit scores, lack of rental history, criminal records, and record of eviction were also highlighted as prevalent barriers to obtaining affordable housing. In a competitive housing market with high demand, individuals who do not meet the criteria of an ideal tenant may not even be considered.

The burden of housing costs is demonstrated in the high number of residents who struggle to pay for necessities. 76% of residents reported that they must decide between paying for housing expenses and paying for basic needs such as food, medication, and clothing. Many also indicated that this is a regular occurrence for them. While these results are alarming, they are consistent with regional economic trends, which indicate a steep increase in cost of living over the past 5 years. The MetroWest Economic Research Center found a 45% increase in the overall cost of living in MetroWest since 2019<sup>5</sup>.

When describing their financial challenges, residents shared the following:

*“My limited financial resources cannot permit me to have housing and basic necessities, so **I have to make choices.**”*

*“I don’t go to the doctor for checkups. **I have sacrificed my health for rent.**”*

*“**I always have to decide** between what to pay. I am going to use the gift card from you guys today to go get food for my family.”*

*“I find myself having to call my son to ask – ‘did you cook any extra food?’ because **after paying my bills I have nothing left.**”*

*“There are days **I do not even eat** because I chose to pay rent.”*

*“It is very **stressful** and can make you **panic.**”*

With the cost of living so high, it is unsurprising that over half of residents (57%) feel that their current housing situation does not meet their family’s needs. For residents who are

<sup>5</sup> Greater MetroWest Economic Profile 2024, pg. 41, accessed via <https://merc-fsu.org/economic-profiles/>

renting, unaffordability and over-crowding were reported as the top reasons. In a 2022 report, the MetroWest Health Foundation noted the severity of overcrowding in the MetroWest community, explaining that the high cost of housing is increasingly causing unrelated individuals to live together out of necessity<sup>6</sup>. Listening session residents echoed this experience, indicating that it is not uncommon for families to share cramped living spaces due to the scarcity of affordable options, even in instances of multiple-income households.

Residents also highlighted physical inaccessibility as a top reason for inadequate housing. Some residents were living in situations that were unsafe for them due to lack of physical accommodations. Others noted that they had to make their own modifications to their apartment (even when they could not afford to do so). Several explained that particularly when becoming disabled or in need of accommodations after beginning their tenancy, they faced challenges having the necessary modifications completed in a timely manner for them to remain safe in their units. As one individual noted, even in affordable units residents may encounter inaccessibility, *“I am disabled, use a cane and I live on the third floor and the elevator has been broken for 2 years.”*

Residents emphasized a fear of reporting landlord ADA non-compliance and/or code violations due to concerns over retribution. With Massachusetts currently facing a historically low vacancy rate of only 1.6%, housing demand statewide is exceptionally high<sup>7</sup>. Unfortunately, listening session discussions revealed that Framingham residents are experiencing the challenging effects of this statewide housing shortage. Given the strong competition for available housing, residents stated a fear that raising concerns about their unit may result in lease non-renewal or even in eviction. Many expressed not knowing what their rights are related to unit issues, leaving them feeling disempowered and stuck.

For those who are temporarily staying with others, staying outside, in shelter, or at risk of losing their unit, there are several reasons that their housing fails to meet their needs. As expected, the top reason was that they are in an insecure and/or temporary rather than permanent accommodation. As one individual explained, *“There is no guarantee that I will stay in my present housing for long. One never knows when it will be taken away.”* The

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<sup>6</sup> “Shut Out: Understanding the affordable housing crisis in MetroWest,” slide 9, accessed via [https://d2yy08d49bfqoo.cloudfront.net/documents/Shut-Out\\_Affordable-Housing-Crisis-in-MetroWest-December-2022.pdf](https://d2yy08d49bfqoo.cloudfront.net/documents/Shut-Out_Affordable-Housing-Crisis-in-MetroWest-December-2022.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities Statewide Housing Plan, [Regional Listening Sessions Presentation](https://www.mass.gov/doc/regional-listening-sessions-overview/download), slide 4, accessed via chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.mass.gov/doc/regional-listening-sessions-overview/download

impacts of this insecurity cannot be overstated, with countless residents sharing the elevated levels of anxiety and depression that they experience due to their housing instability. Another noted, *“My current housing situation is very stressful and has a very negative impact on my mental health and recovery.”* These quotes exemplify the detrimental impacts of housing insecurity on our community.

In addition to uncertainty, those who are in temporary living situations face unique challenges, such as lack of privacy and restrictions imposed on them. Many residents expressed feelings of disempowerment, isolation, loss of dignity, and worsened mental health outcomes due to the lack of control they have with their housing. As shown below, residents frequently have no other choice than to be in housing situations that are negatively impacting them:

*“With my current housing situation, I am unable to have family come over to visit due to restrictions. I **live in isolation**, and this is **traumatizing**. Family is a very important part of my support system.”*

*“There is **no privacy** in my current living situation. I desire to have privacy.”*

*“I have to stay with my mother and **sleep on the couch** in the sitting room.”*

*“I am **really worried** that my current housing situation will make me **relapse** again. I was recently released from incarceration and am homeless.”*

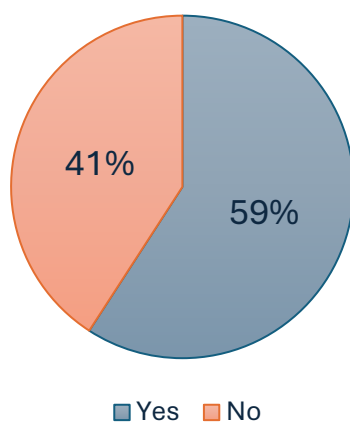
Residents also noted the particular challenges faced by different communities in trying to access adequate affordable housing. For older adults, issues of accessibility are prevalent. Many spoke of living in housing that was inaccessible and too large for them but being unable to afford to downsize. For young adults, there was an overwhelming desire for more support as they transition into adulthood and work to secure housing on their own. Families expressed an interest in intergenerational housing, seeing it as a way to support community bonds while also promoting independence.

Whether it is multi-family or single-units, market-rate or subsidized units, accessible units, or supportive living environments, it is evident that there is a severe shortage of housing of **all** types. Residents continually reported concerns over a lack of available housing stock for all community members, and highlighted scarcity as the most serious issue facing Framingham.

## Discrimination in Housing

To understand housing accessibility, residents were asked about their experiences with discrimination. Below, Graph 3 shows that nearly 60% of residents have experienced discrimination during their housing process:

**Graph 3: Prevalence of Discrimination in Housing ("Have you ever experienced discrimination when trying to access housing?")**



Source: Listening session data

Residents identified race, ethnicity, and language as the top reasons for discrimination. However, residents also noted discrimination based on marital status, disability, and nationality as well. This highlights the issue of equity in housing, as the most historically marginalized communities continue to face discrimination as a barrier to housing.

## 2. SERVICE PROVIDERS, PROGRAMS, & SYSTEMS ARE OVERBURDENED

While experiences with physical housing was a key component of this research, understanding experiences with housing services, systems, and providers was also crucial. With housing being so challenging to navigate and access, residents often need support as they complete applications, identify assistance programs, and engage in the housing search process. As previously mentioned, nearly a quarter of residents indicated lack of knowledge on existing services as a barrier, highlighting the importance of providers in filling that gap. Many residents shared that they do not know what they would do without guidance navigating housing. As the below quotes show, housing services and providers are essential to our community:

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*“I am so **thankful** to Anchored in Recovery Program and SMOC for the assistance I have received. **They did everything to help me.**”*

*“Workers at Tempo **really care**. Tempo deserves more funding. They assist us with rent.”*

*“SMOC did everything for me. Without SMOC, I do not know where I would be today.”*

*“Whenever I need something related to housing, there is always a SMOC case manager to reach out to and **they always have answers and help.**”*

Throughout the listening sessions, residents expressed a gratitude for housing services and providers, but did note several challenges when accessing support. The barriers noted were predominantly centered around providers, services, and systems being overburdened:

- **Feeling unheard and/or dismissed** – When seeking housing assistance, many residents felt rushed by their providers due to the high demand for support. They expressed that their housing service providers are overworked, with large caseloads, high staff turnover, and not enough support. Residents often noted that even when providers want to help and are passionate about their work, sometimes they do not have the resources or capacity to assist in the ways needed. Ultimately, this can negatively impact the experience that some residents have with housing service programs, contributes to feelings of disempowerment, and increases the risk of residents falling through the cracks.
- **Long wait times for assistance** – Overwhelmingly, residents indicated long wait times as a significant barrier to accessing housing service programs. According to the Marlborough Community Development Authority, the average wait time for all Section 8 applicants in Massachusetts is around 10 years <sup>8</sup>. This was the case for some residents, who reported being on housing assistance waitlists for decades. There is frustration and a feeling of hopelessness for many, as one individual stated, *“I feel defeated when I call section 8 and they say check back in a few years.”* Another shared that trying to find housing feels like a *“setup to fail.”* Even finding emergency shelter placement is a challenge, with the state’s shelter system

<sup>8</sup> Marlborough Community Development Authority, accessed via <https://www.marlborough-ma.gov/community-development-authority/affordable-housing/pages/waiting-lists>

completely saturated. For example, homeless adult individuals in Framingham are being referred to shelters in other cities such as Boston due to lack of local capacity. For families seeking emergency shelter, wait times for placement are uncertain. Though eligible families are supposed to be placed immediately, the state of Massachusetts issued an emergency regulation in October 2023 capping the shelter system at 7,500 families due to oversaturation<sup>9</sup>. Unfortunately, there is a need for housing assistance that exceeds the system’s available services, leaving residents incredibly concerned over how to obtain safe housing, whether it be temporary or permanent. Residents repeatedly echoed that they feel “*stuck*” when it comes to their current housing situation.

- **Limited program availability** – In conjunction with long wait times, when residents do receive support, they expressed concerns over not having a choice in the housing assistance that is offered to them. For example, those awaiting emergency shelter may receive placement in a city outside of Framingham or MetroWest due to limited availability. This results in residents being isolated and away from their social supports, job, medical care, and community.

### 3. STIGMA AROUND HOUSING INSTABILITY PERSISTS

Experiences with stigma were commonly shared among residents. Across communities, there were high levels of shame and embarrassment around housing insecurity. For some residents, this stigma arose from cycling in-and-out of housing instability and needing to access services more than once. One respondent stated, “*They don’t see us as people, we’re just clients.*”

For those who have been securely housed for most of their life, stigma presented as a sense of shame when finding themselves in housing instability, a situation that is challenging to accept. There was a persistent concern of judgement by both providers and other community members.

Residents spoke of harmful stereotypes that those experiencing housing insecurity are “*lazy*” or must be “*drug users.*” This bias results in residents feeling ashamed to seek

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<sup>9</sup> Mass Legal Help, accessed via <https://www.masslegalhelp.org/housing-apartments-shelter/emergency-shelter/emergency-assistance-basic-shelter-rights-families>

assistance from housing providers or prevents them from even disclosing their housing status at all.

#### 4. SYSTEMIC ISSUES ARE PERVASIVE

When examining housing access and experiences with housing service programs, countless systemic issues became evident. The below challenges were noted as top concerns for residents:

- **Affordable housing programs tend to be siloed** – Residents shared frustration over affordable housing services operating in isolation. When experiencing a housing need, residents may qualify for several forms of assistance or may be eligible to apply to more than one housing program. However, identifying and navigating these siloed services proves incredibly difficult and logistically tedious, even for providers. Residents expressed a desire for a more streamlined application process, as well as coordinated support with housing navigation across programs.
- **Housing systems and services can be inaccessible for the most marginalized community members** – For those trying to obtain housing assistance or apply to affordable housing programs, accessing support can be a challenging feat. Even when programs or services exist, residents must often navigate barriers such as lack of transportation, lack of internet access, documentation challenges (ex: not having an ID or birth certificate), lack of childcare, language barriers, and inaccessible hours of operation. Residents noted that increased support with transportation as well as more flexible service-delivery options would make it easier for them to navigate the services that they desperately need.
- **Need for increased clarity around program eligibility & priority categories** – Across communities, there was a shared concern regarding the need for clarity on affordable housing program eligibility criteria and priority placement. Residents expressed not understanding why some were housed seemingly quickly, while others remained on waiting lists for years. Residents indicated that having greater transparency around formulas for priority and placement would assist in reducing frustration as well as increasing resident knowledge.
- **Affordable housing program eligibility feels unrealistic** – Residents repeatedly expressed feeling that affordable housing program eligibility does not reflect the needs of those facing housing instability. For example, residents noted that some



transitional living programs require you to be in a shelter prior to entrance into the program. This creates a significant barrier, particularly for those who congregate shelter is not the best option. Income guidelines for program eligibility are also strict, and disproportionate to the cost of living. Utilizing gross-income for affordable housing eligibility creates a skewed picture of affordability. The statement that “*Affordable housing is not truly affordable*” was raised in every single listening session. Residents also shared frustration with the rigidity of income eligibility criteria, as some might lose their assistance despite still not earning enough to afford market-rate units. The listening sessions revealed that the rigidity and often all-or-nothing nature of housing assistance may not adequately respond to the community’s ever-changing needs.

- **Root causes of housing instability require long-term solutions** – Consistently, residents expressed feeling that the current approaches to housing instability tend to focus on short-term solutions. Residents emphasized that they frequently cycle in-and-out of housing instability, some utilizing services intermittently for over 10 years. It is apparent that there is a need for increased social services coordinated alongside housing support to place residents in housing and then keep them housed. Residents highlighted assistance with employment and educational development, programs to help build savings, and more accessible pathways to homeownership as crucial components of sustainable solutions to housing instability.

## V. Recommendations

Due to the small sample size of this study, larger-scale research on affordable housing experiences in Framingham is necessary. To ensure that policies, projects, and interventions are responsive to experiences of those impacted by housing issues, the following recommendations are provided:

1. **Utilize Resident-Centered Research:** Future research efforts should build upon the insights gained from this report by continuing to include and amplify resident voices. Alongside quantitative research, incorporating qualitative methods such as interviews, focus groups, or participatory action research can provide a deeper understanding of residents' experiences, perspectives, and needs within the housing context.

2. **Engage Landlords in Research:** To foster a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics and challenges within the housing market, future research should include the perspectives of landlords and property managers. By involving landlords and property managers, the City of Framingham can explore a broader spectrum of issues such as rental property management, investment incentives, and regulatory impacts on local housing affordability. This engagement can help identify barriers to affordable housing, explore landlord-tenant relationships, and develop strategies for promoting sustainable and equitable housing practices.

## VI. Conclusion

Securing affordable, accessible housing in Framingham continues to prove challenging. As a result of historically low vacancy rates and an incredibly high cost of living, Framingham residents are struggling more than ever to find housing that is sustainable and meets their needs. As the following data points highlight, the impacts of the housing crisis are worrisome:

56% of residents are currently living in unstable housing situations.

When identifying barriers to affordable housing, 65% of residents indicated an obstacle related to housing costs and/or household income.

76% of residents must decide between paying for housing expenses and paying for basic necessities such as food, medication, and clothing.

The development of a Housing Production Plan is an important opportunity for the City of Framingham to make a positive impact on the housing landscape. It is hoped that the findings from this report will provide insight into the complexity of the housing crisis and be used to inform future research as the City of Framingham's develops a Housing Production Plan.

## VII. Appendix

### A. MetroWest Housing Coalition Organizational Membership List

*The Coalition has representation from the following organizations, departments, offices, & municipalities:*

Advocates, Anchored in Recovery, Bethany Hill Place, City of Framingham, Community Foundation for MetroWest, Fallon Health, Family Promise MetroWest, Family Success Partnership, Framingham City Council, Framingham Community Justice Support Center, Framingham Department of Public Health, Framingham Housing Authority, Framingham Police Department, Framingham Public Schools, Hudson Health Department, Jewish Family Services of MetroWest, Metro Community Development Corporation, MetroWest Health Foundation, MetroWest Legal Services, MetroWest Mediation Services, Natick Public Schools, Natick Service Council Inc., Office of Senate President Karen Spilka, South Middlesex Opportunity Council, Spectrum Health Systems, Tufts Medical Center Cancer Care Framingham, United Way of Tri-County, Wayside Tempo Young Adult Resource Center.

### B. Community Listening Session Introduction & Questions

#### Introduction

The MetroWest Housing Coalition is a group of organizations and housing service providers who come together to support affordable housing in the MetroWest area. The coalition is currently working on a project to better understand community members' experiences with housing in order to:

1. Improve housing services
2. Increase access to resources
3. Advocate for the community's needs

As a community member, you have important knowledge, experiences, and insights into the realities of accessing housing in the MetroWest area. By participating in this community conversation, you will be providing valuable information that is necessary to improve affordable housing resources and advocacy efforts. This information will help us to better support you in accessing housing resources and will guide our efforts to strengthen affordable housing in our community.

Your input in today's session will remain anonymous. We will be taking notes during our conversations, but we will not record your name or any identifying information. We ask that

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everything shared today remains confidential and is not shared with anyone outside the listening session.

To compensate you for your time today, you'll receive a Visa gift card.

Once we have analyzed the information from today's conversations, we will follow up with the community organization and provide updates to be shared with you all.

Do you have any questions?

Thank you very much for participating in this exercise.

**Listening session questions:** (you may decline to answer any question)

1. Where are you currently living/staying?\*
  - a. I own a home
  - b. I am renting an apartment that I can afford
  - c. I am renting an apartment that I cannot afford and/or am at risk of losing
  - d. I am renting a room
  - e. I am staying in a motel/hotel
  - f. I am temporarily staying with others (ex: with friends, family, community members, etc.)
  - g. I am permanently staying with others (ex: with friends, family, community members, etc.)
  - h. I am staying at a shelter
  - i. I am staying in a vehicle
  - j. I am staying at a group home, transitional living program, sober living program, etc.
  - k. I am staying outside
  - l. I am living/staying in another situation: \_\_\_\_\_
  
2. Does your current housing meet you and your family's needs?
  - a. For example, is your housing:
    - i. The proper size to for your family
    - ii. Close to your employment
    - iii. Close to your relatives/family/community supports
    - iv. Close to your medical care and/or social services
    - v. In acceptable physical condition (ex: proper sanitation, free from lead & mold, meets structural codes, etc.)
    - vi. Physically accessible (ex: if needed - has a wheelchair ramp, large doorways, bathroom handrails, etc.)

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- vii. The appropriate type of housing (ex: shared vs independent living)
  - viii. A permanent/long-term vs a temporary accommodation
  - ix. A safe environment (ex: free from fear of harassment/discrimination)
  - x. Other \_\_\_\_\_
3. Have you ever had to decide between paying your housing expenses or taking care of you/your family's other essential needs?
    - a. For example, having to pay housing expenses instead of buying food, going to the doctor, paying for medication, etc.
  4. When you have a housing related need, where do you/would you go for assistance?
    - a. Which organizations, community spaces, families, or community leaders do you trust?
  5. What housing resources/supports are you aware of in the MetroWest community?
    - a. If you've ever tried to access housing resources – what was your experience? (Were you able to find the resources you need? Were they helpful?)
    - b. How many times have you tried to access housing resources
  6. What affordable housing resources do you think are missing in the MetroWest area?
  7. What type of challenges do you face when trying to access affordable housing?
 

*Affordable housing is housing that meets your needs and is financially sustainable – this means that you are able to pay your rent, bills, and for your necessities & you are not at risk of losing your housing due to the cost.*

    - a. Examples of challenges may include:
      - i. Low and/or fixed income
      - ii. High housing cost for market rate units
      - iii. Limited supply of affordable/ income-based housing units
      - iv. Limited financial assistance for housing (ex: subsidies, rental assistance, utility assistance)
      - v. Discrimination
      - vi. Lack of knowledge on the type of housing resources that exist in the community
      - vii. Unsure where to go for support
      - viii. Concerns around financial implications of accessing housing support (ex: fear of owing the state)
      - ix. Concerns around immigration implications of accessing housing support (ex: fear of deportation, fear of negative affect on future immigration status)

8. What changes could be made to make housing service programs more accessible?
  - a. What could we improve as organizations to better support you?
  - b. What barriers get in the way of you accessing housing service programs?  
(What makes it challenging for you to utilize services?)
  
9. What are your biggest concerns around housing in your community?
  
10. Have you ever experienced discrimination, bias, or prejudice when trying to access housing and/or housing resources?
  - a. Do you feel like you were treated differently/unfairly because of your identity and/or lived experiences?
    - i. Have landlords ever asked you or your family about the following:
      1. Disability or the nature or severity of disability
      2. Race
      3. Ethnicity
      4. National origin
      5. Sexual orientation
      6. Gender
      7. Language
      8. Religion,
      9. Age of the applicants' children
      10. Marital status
      11. If receiving government benefit assistance
      12. Military status
  
11. What are the biggest community strengths/assets in the MetroWest?
  
12. As we complete this project, how would you like us to follow up with you to share our findings and updates?
  - a. Social media postings (Facebook, TikTok, websites)
  - b. Sharing with community associations/ organizations
  - c. Sharing with religious communities
  - d. Posting hard copy materials in public places
  - e. Another format:

### **C. Community Listening Session Experience Survey**

Thank you so much for participating in our community conversation around affordable housing in the MetroWest area.

Please use this form to tell us about your experience & share any additional input you may have. The survey will take approximately 5 minutes to complete. Your feedback will be used to improve future community conversations.

**1. Where are you currently living/staying?**

- a) I own a home
- b) I am renting an apartment that I can afford
- c) I am renting an apartment that I cannot afford and/or am at risk of losing
- d) I am renting a room
- e) I am staying in a motel/hotel
- f) I am temporarily staying with others (ex: with friends, family, community members, etc.)
- g) I am permanently staying with others (ex: with friends, family, community members, etc.)
- h) I am staying at a shelter
- i) I am staying in a vehicle
- j) I am staying at a group home, transitional living program, sober living program, etc.
- k) I am staying outside
- l) I am living/staying in another situation:

**2. How would you rate your experience?**

- a) 5 – I strongly enjoyed participating & would do so again in the future
- b) 4 – I enjoyed participating & would consider doing so again in the future
- c) 3 – I am neutral & would be open to future participation
- d) 2 – I disliked participating & most likely would not do so in the future
- e) 1 – I strongly disliked participating & would not do so in the future

If you'd like, please share how we could improve\_\_\_\_\_

**3. Do you feel that your input was respected?**

- a) Yes
- b) No

How can we do better next time?

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**4. Do you feel like you were fairly compensated for your time?**

- a) Yes
- b) No

How could we improve our compensation in the future?

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**5. Do you feel that the conversation was accessible?**

*Accessible means that you were able to participate in the way that is most comfortable for you and met your needs.*

- a) Yes
- b) No

How can we make the conversation more accessible?

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**6. Do you have any additional feedback to share your experience participating in the community conversation?**

- a) Yes
- 

- b) No

**7. Do you have any additional feedback to share about housing in the MetroWest area?**

- a) Yes
- 

- b) No

**8. How would you like us to follow up with you to share our findings and updates?**

- a) Via social media postings (Facebook, TikTok, websites)
- b) Sharing with community associations/ organizations
- c) Sharing with religious communities
- d) Posting hard copy materials in public places
- e) Another format

I would prefer to receive  
information \_\_\_\_\_