



## Merger aims for 'friendlier' housing plan

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Officials and housing activists in smaller towns on the North Shore have a love/hate relationship with Chapter 40B, the state's affordable-housing law.

On the one hand, they acknowledge their communities don't have enough moderately priced homes, making it difficult or impossible for school and town employees to live where they work.

On the other hand, they live in perpetual fear of developers using the law to force oversized developments on them in undesirable locations.

The recent merger of two local organizations is aimed at offering an alternative, what are sometimes called "friendly" 40B developments.

Harborlight Community Partners, a Beverly nonprofit, and the North Shore Housing Trust, with offices in Newburyport, are joining forces in a move that combines the trust's vision for increasing affordable-housing options and Harborlight's experience and size.

Harborlight already manages 211 units of affordable housing on the North Shore.

"We're honoring the vision and intent of the North Shore Housing Trust as it was originally configured," said Andrew DeFranza, Harborlight's executive director.

"We're maximizing their capacity without affecting their core mission," said Harborlight's president, Paul Lanzikos.

In the complex worlds of both financing and operating affordable housing, volunteer organizations like the Housing Trust see their resources stretched to the limit, Lanzikos said. Volunteers simply can't handle all the work.

Gordon King, chairman of the Housing Trust, said some jobs — such as day-to-day oversight of affordable housing complexes — are best left to organizations with paid staff.

The trust's most prominent development on the North Shore was conversion of the Whipple Annex behind Ipswich Town Hall into 10 affordable apartments for people over 62. Harborlight will take over management of the building as part of the merger.

More recently, Harborlight closed on the purchase of a building on Willow Street in Hamilton that houses the Acord food pantry. DeFranza says that project will showcase the kind of development the new organization plans to tout to other towns.

The pantry was about to lose its lease and had nowhere else to go, when Acord turned to Harborlight for help. Harborlight's purchase of the property will save the space for the food pantry. In addition, the space will be renovated to include three studio apartments on the second floor and a one-bedroom, handicapped-accessible apartment on the first floor. All of the apartments are planned to be affordable for those making between 50 percent and 65 percent of the median household income, \$82,000, in metro Boston.

DeFranza said he recognizes fears about predatory developers who would propose projects out of scale with their surroundings.

"They (small towns) want contextual developments, I understand that," he said. "We don't want to be viewed as outsiders. We want to happen what happened in Hamilton — they came to us."

That usually means a larger number of smaller developments, but those are a problem as stand-alone projects.

"They can't do little projects, they're not economical," DeFranza said.

The new organization, on the other hand, has the size and experience to take on developments that wouldn't be feasible for towns or for-profit developers, he said.

There may be pent-up demand for the kinds of developments DeFranza envisions. Towns that adopt the Community Preservation Act are required to dedicate 10 percent of each year's portion of the surcharge on personal property taxes to affordable housing.

By and large, those funds have been accumulating as officials waited for suitable developments to come along.

"We're hoping they will not only be happy to see us, they'll be very happy to see us," DeFranza said.

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