

Boston to review affordable housing plan



KEITH BEDFORD/GLOBE STAFF/FILE

Boston Mayor Martin J. Walsh toured this renovated house in 2017.

By [Tim Logan](#)

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Boston officials plan to revamp the city's largest affordable housing program this year, and may require market-rate developers to contribute more to it.

The Boston Planning & Development Agency is pushing ahead with a long-discussed review of its Inclusionary Development Policy, which requires most housing developers to set aside 13 percent of units in new buildings at affordable rents, or pay money into the city's affordable housing funds.

The 19-year-old program is coming off one of its most successful years.

A report set to be released Tuesday shows that 546 inclusionary units opened in 2018 — about one-fourth of its total production since launching in 2000 — with 834 more under construction or permitted.

But the Walsh administration faces mounting pressure from housing advocates to mandate more affordable housing in new projects, especially in parts of the city where fast-rising rents threaten to push lower-income renters from their homes.

The agency recently hired a consulting firm to analyze the city's development market to help determine how much affordable housing to require. City officials will also discuss the issue with developers and housing advocates, and plan to hold a series of community meetings on the plan this spring and early summer.

“Any change to IDP or linkage (a similar program requiring developers of commercial buildings to contribute funding for affordable housing) will come down to the economics of development here in Boston,” said Sheila Dillon, the city's chief of housing.

Years into a building boom that has transformed the city's skyline and pushed large-scale development into neighborhoods across the city, construction costs have risen to a point that even a modest apartment can cost \$400,000 to build.

Meanwhile, the surge of new apartments are starting to put a lid on rent growth, especially on pricier new apartments.

That dynamic, real estate specialists say, could prompt developers and investors to put the brakes on new development.

At the same time, advocates point out that many Bostonians have been left behind, and are facing rents they can no longer afford.

Some groups are pushing for much higher affordability requirements, or for more units that are affordable to lower-income residents.

Many units are set at rents affordable to a family of four earning \$75,000 or more, when [nearly half of city residents earn \\$35,000 or less](#) a year.

Many of the affordable apartments created by the program in the last few years have been downtown and in the Seaport District, where large-scale new development has been concentrated.

Nearly half of the 546 apartments that opened in 2018 came in one building, The Beverly, a fully-affordable 239-unit building near North Station, while several other large Seaport developments added

big blocks of affordable housing.

As they look to tweak the program for the future, city officials say they're trying to strike a balance, creating enough housing to better meet the need without mandating so much that they squelch development altogether.

"It is really expensive to build housing of any kind in Boston," said agency director Brian Golden.

"We want a program that is workable," he said.

They expect to finalize a new plan — which needs approval from the agency's board but not the City Council — later this year.

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