

# Housing focus of economic forum

Cape participants cite need for affordable, workforce developments

By Doug Fraser  
 dfraser@capecodonline.com

CHATHAM — State officials met with more than 100 municipal and business leaders from across the Cape and Islands on Tuesday to get input for the state's economic development plan, a blueprint that will guide the Baker administration and Legislature throughout the Republican governor's second term.

This blueprint, in part, helps to determine where to spend hundreds of millions of dollars in grant programs in areas such as dredging, infrastructure improvements and contaminated site cleanups.

Not surprisingly, state officials heard that housing, particularly workforce housing, was the limiting factor for many Cape businesses. Fittingly, they chose to hold the meeting in Chatham, where the disparity between what workers earn and what they can afford is a chasm. The Cape Cod Commission's housing market analysis predicted that by 2020 there would be a \$527,000 gap between what the median income household could afford and the median sales price of homes in Chatham.

"If you want to be a plumber or electrician, there's a lot of work down here," Eastham Town Planner Paul Lagg said. "But they don't have anywhere to live. They can get good jobs, there's a lot of work, but you can't find any housing here."

"Any hospitality business on the Outer Cape is also in the housing business," said Jay Coburn, chief executive officer of the Community Development Partnership. New businesses, Coburn said, have

the additional hurdles of finding workers and finding them affordable accommodations.

Dorothy Savarese, president and CEO of Cape Cod Five Cents Savings Bank, said the lack of workforce and affordable housing was stifling the emergence of new businesses.

The lack of workers is the No. 1 issue in his discussions with Cape business owners, state Sen. Julian Cyr said. "What is driving workforce issues is housing.

"We have put significant resources into land conservation, and we will continue to do that in appropriate places, but the focus now has to be on housing development and the development of places that people who are going to make this peninsula function can live," Cyr said.

Gov. Charlie Baker's housing choice legislation, now before the Joint Committee on Housing, would give municipalities the tools to address housing issues, particularly a proposed change that would reduce the two-thirds majority vote needed to enact zoning changes to a simple majority vote, said Lt. Gov. Karyn Polito and Secretary of Housing and Economic Development Mike Kennealy.

Kennealy and Polito attended the Chatham meeting as co-leaders of the Economic Development Planning Council. This was the seventh of nine such informational hearings statewide.

"The overall consensus I get from people on the Cape is that they want to transfer to being more of a year-round community," said Polito, who sees the Cape's problem as a



supply-and-demand issue.

“The opportunity lies in producing more units of housing that this region wants and needs,” she said. By leveraging the region’s assets, its natural beauty and excellent school systems, and growing the local economy, she said, the Cape and Islands could attract more young talent, retain it and make the region a more viable option for young families.

The Cape gets a good share of Seaport Economic Council grants and dredging grants, which bolster the vital marine economy. Two emerging industries are the so-called blue economy, marine research and exploration technologies centered in Woods Hole, and offshore wind, Polito said.

But others at the meeting saw housing issues presenting significant hurdles to developing new businesses and attracting workers to the region.

“Resistance is what we see in Dennis,” said Robert Samoluk, co-chairman of the Dennis Municipal Affordable Housing Trust. Opposition by neighbors and other residents to affordable housing projects is still cited as the No. 1 reason they don’t get built on Cape Cod.

Plus, Cape towns tend not to fare well against the state’s larger municipal areas when it comes to housing grants. In the latest round of MassHousing’s \$100 million workforce grant program, most of the money went to the big cities. Out of the 631 workforce housing units created with MassHousing grants between 2016 and 2018, seven were in Bourne and 15 in North Eastham.

Cyr said he supports Baker’s housing choice bill and believes it will pass soon. But he would like to see additional legislation that could target housing problems specific to the Cape and

Islands. Cyr has filed An Act Relative to Attainable Housing in Seasonal Communities, which he hopes will bolster efforts to create affordable and workforce housing.

The bill contains 10 proposals, including allowing unused Community Preservation Act funds to go to affordable housing; making accessory dwelling units a by-right use, with no special permit; establishing a commission to look at burdensome regulations; instituting a transfer tax on property sales over \$2 million to fund affordable housing; and allowing the state Department of Housing and Community Development to finance workforce housing for school districts, municipalities and developers.

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Coburn



Savarese



Polito