

BATH HOUSING STRATEGIC PLAN – 2018

SECTION ONE—INTRODUCTION

The concept of home is important to all. It connotes feelings of security and belonging. Unfortunately, in the Bath region, as in other parts of Maine, it is increasingly difficult for many people, including seniors and families to find stable, affordable housing. This is due to a number of factors, including the high cost of housing in Maine relative to income.

Bath Housing is making progress in addressing this problem by developing and operating residential units. We are known for properties that are well-managed, well-maintained, and considered assets to their neighborhoods and communities.

Despite this progress, the problem continues to outpace the available solutions. That is why we are pursuing strategies in addition to “bricks and mortar.” These include eviction prevention and helping seniors to remain in their own homes through our innovative *Comfortably Home* program. These solutions and others require us to collaborate in new ways with organizations and government at the local, regional, state, and national levels.

Meeting the needs of existing residents, while developing new residential options, would not be possible without our outstanding staff. It is their skills and dedication that embody the work of Bath Housing and breathe life into our mission.

This strategic plan reflects our priorities for the next three to five years. In particular, we will focus on: Relationships, Solutions, Advocacy, and Capacity Building.

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SECTION TWO: METHODOLOGY

This strategic plan provides long-term, overarching guidance for the next three to five years and will be used by the board of directors and management team to make decisions regarding resources and direction. It was developed with considerable input from the board and staff, who provided valuable perspective regarding the organization, and the needs of current and prospective residents. The strategic plan will be supported by annual action plans developed by the management team and staff to make, track, and report on progress. The strategic plan and annual action plans will be reviewed at least annually by the combined boards.

SECTION THREE: PRIORITIES AND STRATEGIES

This section describes our four priority areas and the strategies we will use to advance towards them.

I. Relationships

As an organization devoted to housing solutions, **we rely on relationships—both internal and external.** These relationships depend on developing trust over time through consistent, credible actions and interactions. External relationships are needed to attract funding, create effective policies, develop properties, and forge new solutions. Strong and positive relationships among our team are essential to achieve our mission. And finally, the well-being of the individuals we serve depends on their sense of relationship to Bath Housing. Do they feel that their needs are important? Do they feel a sense of community? In short, relationships are the foundation for much of our work. The strategies below are intended to strengthen our relationships in key areas: residents, staff, external stakeholders, and community organizations.

“Each friendship and relationship is important.”

-staff member

Strategies

A. To provide extraordinary customer service for current and prospective **residents of Bath Housing properties**, we will:

1. Treat each person with courtesy, compassion, and respect, regardless of circumstances.
2. Be sensitive to the changing needs of individual residents.
3. Respond more efficiently to repairs and requests through improvements in internal systems.
4. Provide residents with information important to them in a timely manner.
5. Develop the institutional relationships (e.g., school systems) important to supporting residents.

B. To enable the **Bath Housing team** to deliver outstanding service, we will:

1. Foster a culture of recognition, appreciation, and sense of team.
2. Strive to be competitive in wages and benefits.
3. Strengthen internal communication, e.g., enable staff to respond to resident questions, anticipate and organize work, and know about developments and issues related to responsibilities.
4. Encourage suggestions to improve the work environment and processes.
5. Improve orientation and training processes for new staff.
6. Provide support for human resource needs and questions.
7. Improve education and training relevant to the needs and interests of staff, and to the organization's strategic objectives.

"Limited reserve capacity adds a burden to staff and increases the likelihood of a single point failure. Cross training is one of the strategies to address this need."
-board member

C. To understand the needs and suggestions of **external stakeholders**, we will:

1. Maintain and deepen communication with key funders, regulators, and investors, e.g., HUD, MaineHousing, banks, and others.
2. Seek collaborative, solution-oriented discussions with developers.
3. Seek observations and suggestions from municipal and community representatives including elected officials, first responders, general assistance, health providers, educators, and others.

"Bath Housing is part of a greater system."
-board member

D. To leverage the collective efforts of **community organizations**, we will:

1. Seek opportunities to work with organizations and coalitions to develop solutions, including local, state, and national groups, e.g., United Way and Maine Council on Aging.
2. In addition to providing services for seniors, seek housing solutions for people with other challenges such as behavioral, developmental, mobility, and/or medical.
3. Emphasize housing availability as a key component in preventing and resolving homelessness, both pervasive and transitional.

II. Solutions

Because individual needs vary widely, **establishing secure and stable homes is a complex undertaking**. The strategies below reflect the reality that one size doesn't fit all. With assistance, some individuals can remain in their own homes. Others need extensive support services wherever they live. Meeting the needs of such a diverse population often requires collaboration with other groups, and new public policies and revenue streams.

"If we do what we've always done, we can't expect to make progress."

-executive
director

Strategies

To **develop and implement housing options**, we will take the following steps:

A. Real estate development

1. Create new housing opportunities through new construction for both seniors and families.
2. Maintain affordability and improve housing conditions through acquisition and rehabilitation of existing multi-family units.
3. Be alert to opportunities such as *Community Development Block Grants* (CDGB), rehabilitation of unsubsidized properties, and facilitation or development of new properties.

B. Housing choice vouchers

1. Implement *Mainstream* vouchers [assists non-elderly people with disabilities].
2. Analyze best use of project-based housing vouchers [rental assistance in specific buildings].
3. Assist landlords and tenants to improve their understanding of voucher programs.

C. Comfortably Home

1. Embrace the continued operation of *Comfortably Home*, which assists low-income seniors to safely age in place, and explore feasibility of continued expansion and replication.

D. Housing navigation

1. Support housing navigation efforts, including collaborating with complementary service providers.

E. Eviction prevention

1. Continue developing eviction prevention strategies, such as tenant education.

F. Property management

1. Meet the needs and interests of current residents, while balancing longer-term capital and infrastructure needs of properties.

G. New models

1. Encourage discussion and idea generation, both internally and in collaboration with others, regarding new models to address housing needs.

III. Advocacy

Creating housing options involves an **extensive and varied array of stakeholders, regulations, policies, and funding**. Our priority is to work with the public and private sectors to develop the policies, funding, and coalitions necessary to make substantial progress. We also will work to build awareness of the importance of stable, affordable housing to the social and economic vitality of communities.

“These people are us.”

-board member

Strategies

A. To **improve public policies** leading to more and better housing options, we will:

1. Continue to foster a close, positive working relationship with funders and regulators, and in particular MaineHousing and HUD.
2. Maintain and grow relationships with municipal officials in our service area, with attention to a wide range of strategies including zoning changes, density bonuses, disposition of municipally owned properties, tax incentives, and resolution of individual property tax issues.
3. Share the *Comfortably Home* model at state and national levels and advocate for its expansion.
4. Seek opportunities to provide information, and respond to requests from public officials—at all levels of government.

B. To **build awareness** of the importance of housing in creating a vibrant, stable community, we will:

1. Seek opportunities to emphasize the centrality of housing to improve educational achievement, health and wellness, employment, substance use, and other major social indicators.
2. Raise awareness of affordable housing as an important component of combatting homelessness.
3. Develop the internal structure and capacity to be effective in external communication; e.g., staff roles, website redesign, and targeted communications.

IV. Capacity Building

A principal area of focus is to **align growth with capacity**. A number of capacity building strategies are included in other sections of this plan, including staff development and the cultivation of external resources. The items below relate primarily to the operational areas of forecasting, funding, financial systems, and technology. Because this priority is foundational to much of the work ahead, specific objectives related to this priority will be identified on the front-end of this multi-year strategic plan in our 2019 and 2020 annual action plans.

“How can we hold onto our strengths if we are overextended?”
-staff member

Strategies

A. To understand and predict the **staffing levels** needed to meet current and future demands, we will:

1. Improve forecasting methodologies.
2. Consider the best mix of in-house versus outsourced labor.

B. To maintain a **sound financial position and high financial accountability**, we will:

1. Improve data informed decision making by updating budgeting, forecasting, and allocation methodology.
2. Explore portfolio repositioning to reduce financial dependency on HUD without negatively affecting current residents.
3. Implement and maintain a comprehensive capital assessment of all assets.
4. Explore new disposition opportunities available to small housing authorities.

C. To support **efficient operations and ongoing process improvements**, we will:

1. Implement a responsive, user friendly, efficient, and affordable technology system.
2. Identify specific internal process areas on which to focus in our annual action plans.