



Seasonal Community Designation Overview

The Seasonal Communities Designation was created as part of the Affordable Homes Act, passed by the Legislature and signed into law by Governor Maura Healey on Aug. 6, 2024. The Seasonal Communities Designation is designed to recognize and support the unique needs of Massachusetts communities that experience substantial variations in seasonal visitation, employment, and housing demand. The designation supports these municipalities with distinctive tools to benefit the year-round residents, artists and essential public employees who make these communities attractive destinations for seasonal visitors.

As of December 2025, 43 communities in Massachusetts have been offered the Seasonal Communities Designation. It is up to those communities whether they want to accept the designation or not. Communities can vote to accept their designation through a majority vote of their municipal legislative body: town meeting for towns or city council for cities.

Tools and Resources

The Affordable Homes Act provides Seasonal Communities that accept their designation with unique tools to address the housing crisis facing their communities.

Year-Round Occupancy Restrictions

Communities can acquire legal restrictions that require certain homes to be used as year-round primary residences (at least 10 months annually, as defined and enforced by the municipality). This helps protect existing housing stock from being converted into seasonal or short-term rentals. By prioritizing year-round occupancy, this tool helps Seasonal Communities retain a stable workforce, sustain schools and services, and strengthen community cohesion throughout the year.

Attainable Housing

The regulations specify a new type of housing category called attainable housing. This refers to a year-round housing unit that is subject to a restriction that limits occupancy to an individual or household with income that does not exceed 250% of area median income, or a lower limit as determined by the local community. This approach fills a critical gap for Seasonal Communities by supporting teachers, tradespeople, small



business employees, and other middle-income households who are essential to a functioning year-round economy but that may not qualify for traditional affordable housing.

Year-Round Housing Trust Funds

Towns may create a local or regional housing trust fund dedicated to producing and preserving year-round affordable or attainable housing. These trusts can receive money or property from a variety of sources and use it flexibly for housing purposes. Regional trusts allow multiple towns to pool resources to develop affordable housing. They operate similarly to affordable housing trust funds and can even share overlapping membership. For Seasonal Communities with limited individual funding capacity, these trust funds offer a powerful way to scale impact, share expertise, and make sustained progress on housing affordability.

Housing Preference for Essential Public Workers

Communities may adopt housing preferences for local essential public employees (like teachers, first responders, and public works staff) in properties that they acquire or develop. Towns have discretion in determining who is an essential public employee, but any preferences must comply with fair housing laws and be documented with clear data and selection plans. This tool helps Seasonal Communities ensure that critical public services remain staffed year-round by making it feasible for essential workers to live where they serve.

Housing Preference for Local Artists

Communities can expend funds designated for the creation and preservation of artist housing. This housing preference requires complying with fair housing laws and maintaining records describing the need for this housing and how eligibility is determined. By supporting artist housing, Seasonal Communities can sustain the cultural vibrancy and creative economies that often define their identity and drive tourism.

Property Tax Exemption Adjustments

Communities that use the state's residential property tax exemption can increase it up to 50% of the average assessed home value, providing stronger incentives for homes to remain primary residences. This adjustment offers a locally controlled way for Seasonal Communities to lessen the pressure on year-round residents.



Zoning Changes

Seasonal Communities must amend zoning to allow for year-round attainable housing on existing undersized lots (i.e. lots smaller than a municipality's minimum lot size). The housing must still be in a residential zone and comply with floor to area ratio and wastewater requirements, but lot size alone can't be used as a reason to bar development.

Communities also must allow by-right development of tiny houses (a detached dwelling unit of 400 square feet or less), provided they are restricted for year-round occupancy and meet health and safety standards. Communities still have the flexibility to further regulate movable tiny houses.

Both changes give towns and local residents more tools to unlock small-scale housing production, while keeping reasonable community protections in place. Together, these zoning reforms allow Seasonal Communities to incrementally add housing in ways that are context-sensitive, infrastructure-aware, and well-suited to small towns and village centers.

Seasonal Community Grant Program

The Capital Investment Plan makes up to \$4 million available in FY26 and FY27 to support Seasonal Communities (\$2M in each fiscal year). The FY26 grant program is already in process with the 14 communities that have accepted their designation eligible to receive a grant of \$50,000 - \$175,000 for permissible activities, based on population. While the FY27 notice of funding availability has not been released yet, the FY26 permissible activities for grant funds were written as expansively as possible under capital dollar restrictions.

Permissible activities for funding included but were not limited to:

- Planning and zoning activities, including, but not limited to: 1) Planning activities related to housing needs assessments, 2) Zoning and/or bylaw revisions to implement Seasonal Communities policies, and 3) Planning for housing development.
- Local actions for housing development, including but not limited to: 1) Funding for housing development projects, 2) Technical Assistance to establish a Year-Round Housing Trust Fund, and 3) Seed funding for Year-Round Housing Trust to support housing development.
- Public horizontal infrastructure projects to leverage housing development, including pre-construction (design/engineering documents) and/or construction



related to: 1) Sewer lines, septic systems, and other sanitary waste disposal systems, water lines, wells, and water treatment systems; 2) Utility extensions; 3) Streets, roads, curb cuts, and other transit improvements such as crosswalks and pedestrian and bicycle ways; and 4) Other related horizontal infrastructure work adjacent to planned or imminent housing improvements.

Waivers

A municipality may apply to EOHLC for a waiver if it faces undue hardship in meeting certain requirements. The full text and details of these new regulations are available on EOHLC's website: <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/seasonal-communities>

Summary

Seasonal Communities face some of the most acute housing pressures in Massachusetts, driven by a high concentration of seasonal and short-term units, strong tourism demand, and large swings in seasonal employment that strain a limited year-round housing supply. These dynamics have steadily reduced the number of homes available to the workers, families, artists, and public employees who sustain local economies and public services throughout the year. The Seasonal Communities Designation responds directly to these challenges by offering a targeted, voluntary set of tools that help communities stabilize year-round housing, rebalance local markets, and invest in long-term solutions without undermining the economic benefits of seasonal activity. By pairing local choice with new regulatory flexibility, funding, and regional collaboration, the designation provides backing for communities to remain vibrant destinations while also supporting the people who call them home year-round.