

**FAIR HOUSING AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING  
IN BELMONT, MASSACHUSETTS:**

**Data on Availability, Distribution and Quality**

**Prepared By:**

**Roger D. Colton  
Fisher, Sheehan and Colton  
Public Finance and General Economics  
Belmont, Massachusetts**

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Fair housing and affordable housing are inextricably related. It is a sad fact of life today that households who have disabled, single female heads of households, or persons of color tend to live at lower levels of income than others do. Promotion of *fair* housing, therefore, must have the promotion of *affordable* housing as at least one focus of attention.

Community planning regarding the provision of affordable housing in Belmont, Massachusetts should consider at least three housing characteristics:

- o      The availability of affordable housing;
- o      The distribution of affordable housing; and
- o      The quality of affordable housing.

This memo (and the attached tables) presents data regarding these three housing characteristics in Belmont. The data was compiled from information provided through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). While the data is from 1990, it is the most recent information of its type that is now available.

This memo makes no policy recommendations and reaches no policy conclusions. The intent is simply to provide background data for the town of Belmont.

Before beginning the review of information, two sets of definitions are in order.

- o First, two levels of income are generally considered to be low-income for purposes of housing programs. First, for most HUD programs, "low-income" is defined to include all households at or below 80 percent of the area median income. Second, again for most HUD programs, "very low income" is defined to include all households at or below 50 percent of the area median income.<sup>\|</sup>
- o Second, "affordable" housing refers to housing the total cost of which would impose a shelter burden of at or below 30% of income. For these purposes, "shelter" burden includes the cost of rent or mortgage *plus* the cost of all utilities (except telephone). Accordingly, if rent (or mortgage) plus the sum of home heating, electricity and water/sewer exceeds 30% of income, the housing unit is not considered to be "affordable."

#### **INCOME, RACE AND ETHNICITY**

Table 1 presents a breakdown of income by race and Hispanic origin in Belmont. It shows that few persons of color live in Belmont at lower income levels. Table 1 further shows that households living at these income levels are *not* universally renters. At each of the three median income levels studied, nearly half of the households are homeowners. When one considers "affordable housing" in Belmont, therefore, one should consider more than simply increasing affordable rental housing.

#### **AVAILABILITY OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING**

The availability of affordable housing can first be considered by looking at data concerning the housing stock. Table 2 below presents the

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<sup>\|</sup> The data below is confined to an examination of low-income and very low-income households. The information is further broken into by three discrete groups for which analysis is undertaken: (1) households at 0 - 30% of median income; (2) households at 31 - 50% of median income; and (3) households at 51 - 80% of median income.

number of units of housing in Belmont which are "affordable" at different levels of median income. Table 2 shows that Belmont has a short supply of housing that would be affordable to households living at from 0 to 80 percent of median income (*i.e.*, low- or very-low income households). Only five owner-occupied homes were available that would be affordable to households living at 0 - 30 percent of median income; only 318 renter-occupied units were affordable to households at 31 - 50 percent of median income. Vacant units (for either renter or owner occupancy) that would be affordable were virtually non-existent.

### **DISTRIBUTION OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING**

One needs to be wary of even this data, however. Merely because a housing unit exists which is affordable to a household who lives at 0 - 30% of median income does not mean that that housing unit is actually occupied by a household with that income. No reason exists, in other words, why a households living at 80%, or 100% or more of median income might not live in a unit that would be affordable to a household with much lesser financial means. The lesson to be learned from this observation is that because of the distribution of housing units amongst income groups, the *total* supply of housing which is affordable to low-income households might be quite different from the *accessible* supply of housing which is affordable to low-income households.

Table 3 sets forth data on the distribution of the supply of affordable housing in Belmont amongst income groups. Table 3 shows, for example, of the 386 rental units affordable to households at 0 - 30 percent of median income, only 185 were actually occupied by households in that income range. Of the 318 rental units affordable to households at 31 - 50 percent of median income, only 77 were actually occupied by households in that income range.

Tables 4 and 5 present summary data. Table 4 compares the number of households with incomes at different levels of median income to the number of total Belmont housing units that would be affordable at those income levels. While 423 renter households live in Belmont at from 0 - 30 percent of median income, only 386 rental units are affordable to households with those income levels (even assuming that all of those units were occupied by these households). Similarly, while 403 homeowner households at 31 - 50 percent of median income live in Belmont, only six (6) owner-occupied housing units exist that are affordable to households at that income level (again assuming that all those units were occupied by these households). What Table 4 shows is that even if there were an exact distributional match in Belmont (*e.g.*, all housing units affordable to households at 0 - 30 percent of median income were actually occupied by households at 0 - 30 percent of median income; all housing units affordable to households at 31 - 50 percent of median income were actually occupied by households at 31 - 50 percent of median income, and so forth), the supply of affordable low-income housing in Belmont is inadequate.

In contrast, Table 5 presents what really happens. This Table presents the total number of households with incomes at different levels of median income compared to the number of those households who are paying either more than 30% or more than 50% of their income for housing. As discussed above, households who pay more than 30% of their income for shelter costs are considered to be in housing which is not affordable. Of the 343 Belmont renter households who live at 31 - 50 percent of median income, for example, 272 pay more than 30 percent of income, and 207 pay more than 50 percent of income toward their shelter costs. Of the 403 Belmont homeowners who live at 31 - 50 percent of median income, 240 pay more than 30 percent, and 111 pay more than 50 percent of income toward their shelter costs.

## **HOUSING AFFORDABILITY AND HOUSING QUALITY**

The mere fact that certain housing units may be affordable to households with lower incomes does not mean that those housing units are adequate or appropriate housing. After all, the goal of affordable housing is not simply to get people into *any* housing which may have an affordable price tag, but rather to get people into *quality* affordable housing.

Table 6 presents data on Belmont housing which may be occupied by households with lower levels of median income, but which has physical problems with it. Physical problems are categorized by HUD into "moderate" or "severe." The "severe classification" is based on an assessment of five different factors, including: plumbing, heating, electric, upkeep, and hallways. The "moderate" classification examines each of these given factors along with the kitchen. A distribution between housing units with "moderate" and those with "severe" physical problems is not available.

Table 6 shows the quality of housing in Belmont at lower income levels. Of the 343 renter households in Belmont living at 31 - 50 percent of median income,<sup>(2)</sup> 275 have either moderate or severe physical problems. Of the 339 homeowners at 0 to 30 percent of median income,<sup>(3)</sup> 239 have either moderate or severe physical problems.

## **SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS**

The lack of affordable housing in Belmont comes as no surprise. The data in this memo, however, helps quantify the problem. This memo further demonstrates that it is not simply the *number* of affordable units that is important to consider. Instead, one must consider the availability, distribution and quality of affordable housing.

One task that inheres in the promotion of *fair* housing in Belmont is the promotion of *affordable* housing. If Belmont wishes to promote diversity, it has a major affordable housing task ahead of it.

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<sup>(2)</sup> Not simply those living in affordable housing units.

<sup>(3)</sup> Not simply those living in affordable housing units.

Table 1: Number of Low-Income Households by Race and Hispanic Origin  
and by Ratio of Income to Median Income  
(Belmont, Massachusetts)

Ratio of Income to Median Income	Number of Households								
	Renters			Homeowners			Total		
	White	Black	Hispanic	White	Black	Hispanic	White	Black	Hispanic
0 - 30%	389	0	0	339	0	0	728	0	0
31 - 50%	332	0	8	398	0	0	730	0	8
51 - 80%	403	12	0	317	0	0	720	12	0

NOTES:

White includes white, non-Hispanic.

SOURCE:

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, CHAS Data Base (CD-ROM).

Table 2: Number of Housing Units Affordable  
at Different Levels of Median Income  
(Belmont, Massachusetts)

Median Income	Number of Units				
	Occupied		Vacant		
	Renter	Owner	For Rent	For Sale Only	
0 - 30%	386	5	30	0	
31 - 50%	318	6	5	0	
51 - 80%	573	13	51	0	

SOURCE:  
U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, CHAS Data Base (CD-ROM).

Table 3: Occupancy of Housing Units Affordable at Different Ratios of Income to Median Income  
 Number of Units Occupied by Households with Different Incomes  
 (Belmont, Massachusetts)

Levels of Median Income at which Units are Affordable	Renter-Occupied Units			Owner-Occupied Units				
	Total Available	Renter Occupant Incomes			Total Available	Owner Occupant Incomes		
		0 - 30%	0 - 50%	0 - 80%		0 - 30%	0 - 50%	0 - 80%
0 - 30%	386	185	254	276	5	0	0	0
31 - 50%	318	28	71	93	6	6	6	6
51 - 80%	573	54	150	227	13	0	7	13

SOURCE:  
 U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, CHAS Data Base (CD-ROM).

Table 4: Number of Households at Different Ratios of Income to Median Income  
Compared to Number of Units of Housing Available at those Ratios

Median Income	Renter Occupied		Owner Occupied	
	No. of Households	No. of Affordable Housing Units	No. of Households	No. of Affordable Housing Units
0 - 30%	423	386	339	5
31 - 50%	343	318	403	6
51 - 80%	425	573	317	13

SOURCE:

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, CHAS Data Base (CD-ROM).

Table 5: Number of Households at Different Ratios of Income to Median Income  
 Compared to Number of Households with those Ratios Living in Affordable Housing  
 (Belmont, Massachusetts)

Median Income	Renter Occupied			Owner Occupied		
	Total No.	With Housing Burden		Total No.	With Housing Burden	
		> 30% of Income	> 50% of Income		> 30% of Income	> 50% of Income
0 - 30%	423	244	216	339	239	176
31 - 50%	343	272	207	403	240	111
51 - 80%	425	364	128	317	104	40

SOURCE:  
 U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, CHAS Data Base (CD-ROM).

Table 6: Total Number of Households at Incomes of Different Ratios of Income to Median Income  
Compared to Number of Households at those Ratios Living in Housing Units with Physical Problems

Median Income	Renter Occupied		Owner Occupied	
	Total	With Physical Problems	Total	With Physical Problems
0 - 30%	423	254	339	239
31 - 50%	343	275	403	240
51 - 80%	425	364	317	104

SOURCE:  
U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, CHAS Data Base (CD-ROM).